

Paul Tillich's Understanding of Theology: A Pneumatological Christological Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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Abstracts:

This paper firstly demonstrates the internal problem of Tillich's theology in general and theological method in particular in Tillich shifting his logos Christology to Spirit-Christology. The motif "particularity-universality" as a key notion is not well-balanced throughout its theological development. Secondly, this paper proposes that the doctrine of Trinity, well-articulated in Tillich's 1913 work but finds little attention in his mature work, may provide a more fruitful and embracing symbol to release the tension within the notion of particularity-universality and keep its balance in a dialectical way.

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## 1. Introduction

The Doctrine of Trinity receives little attention in Tillich's mature theology, though Christology and pneumatology are fully explored in his volume two and volume three of *Systematic Theology* (hereafter *ST*). For Tillich, Trinitarian thinking responds to three fundamental problems, namely, the absolute and concrete elements in religious experience, concept of living God and God's threefold self-manifestations.<sup>2</sup> Although Tillich mentions clearly that, in his *ST* volume three, the Trinitarian problem is closely related to Christological problem, since "Christology is not complete without pneumatology."<sup>3</sup> That's why for Tillich, following the line of Schleiermacher and in contrast to Karl Barth, locates the Trinitarian symbol as *postlegomena* instead of *prolegomena* of theology. Because, for Tillich, all religious symbols, including Trinitarian symbol, are reflecting the revelatory experience of the theological knowledge.<sup>4</sup> This paper shows that pneumatology not only completes Christology, but also it brings the Trinitarian thinking into the final stage. This paper will argue that this Trinitarian principle will successfully resolve the internal tension of theological existence, theological circle and the problem related to theology of culture and church theology.

Also, pneumatology is no doubt one of the most important yet least discussed subject in Tillich's scholarship, as Langdon Gilkey has expressed.<sup>5</sup> This negligence on the doctrine of Spirit would be partly explained by Tillich's incompleteness of his system whilst in Germany, and his dissatisfaction with his own *magnum opus*, *ST*, published in 1963.<sup>6</sup> However, as this paper aims to argue, it is also Tillich's own intention to use pneumatology as the main key to open up his entire theological system.<sup>7</sup> This paper will show that the completion of this pneumatological consideration should be articulated within a Trinitarian framework. Though John Cooper's pioneers work have provided us with a comprehensive and solid discussion on Tillich's doctrine of Spirit,<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Volume III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p.283. Abbreviation as ST I-III.

<sup>3</sup> Tillich, ST III:285.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Langdon Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000[1990])

<sup>6</sup> Tillich had attempted to articulate his Christian theology three times in his whole life. The first early attempt was the rough work on *systematische Theologie* in 1913. See, Tillich, "Systematische Theologie (1913/14)," Paul Tillich. *Main Works/Hauptwerke* Volume 6. Ed. Gert Hummel. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), pp. 63-82. The second attempt was teaching *dogmatik* in Marburg University in 1925, see Tillich, *Dogmatik. Marburger Vorlesung von 1925*. Herg. Von Werner Schüßler (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1986). The last attempt was well-known *Systematic Theology* (1951-1963), See Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Volume I-III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63).

<sup>7</sup> In the "introduction" of volume three of *Systematic Theology*, Tillich said that "I believe that the volume itself (volume three), especially the section on the doctrine of the Spirit, implicitly answers many of the criticisms." (p.5)

<sup>8</sup> John C. Cooper, *The "Spiritual Presence" in the Theology of Paul Tillich* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997)

it does not touch on the problem of the relationship between pneumatology and the nature of theology in general and theological methodology in particular. This paper attempts firstly to show that Tillich's earlier formulation of his theology of correlation and his later famous theology of culture was consistent with his later articulation and understanding when he shifted his orientation from *Logos Christology* to Spirit-Christology. Secondly, it will show that the dialectical tension between the particularity and universality of the theological circle expressed in volume one of his *ST* is not merely reframed in the language of Spiritual Presence in the volume three but also well-grounded under the Trinitarian perspective which was firstly expressed in his early systematic theological construction named "1913 *Systematische theologie*."<sup>9</sup>

## 2. The Mode of Theological Existence and the Ontological Grounding of Religious Experience

For Tillich, the theological mode is existential in nature and all activities participating in the boundary of theological circle would be claimed as "theological," however, the periphery of this circle is not fixed but extendable. In the "Introduction" of *ST*, Tillich articulates a modality of theological existence in which the mode of concrete and existential attitude should be involved into "theological circle." According to Tillich, engaging in theological thinking and activity means, not merely rational speculation, but the existential situation of faith would inescapably come into the center. Using his own terminology, theological participation is actually of existential concern in which certain "religious" experience are expressed in the unity of the knowing subject and the known object. Detached epistemological framework and dualist system are rejected in an ontological immediate awareness of the Unconditioned. This is exactly the meaning of what Tillich said, "Theology is necessarily existential."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Original German edition, see, Tillich, "Systematische Theologie (1913/14)," Paul Tillich. *Main Works/Hauptwerke* Volume 6. Ed. Gert Hummel. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), pp. 63-82.. English translation, see, Tillich, "Systematische Theologie of 1913," Uwe Carsten Scharf, *The Paradoxical Breakthrough of Revelation. Interpreting the Divine-Human Interplay in Paul Tillich's Work 1913-1964*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), pp.335-478.

<sup>10</sup> Tillich, *ST*:1, p.23. Tillich's theology is customary regarded as "existential theology." This term is somehow misleading though it is not totally wrong. Tillich emphasizes that his theology is both "existential" and "essential." In some occasions, Tillich even rejected this label because existential philosophy and Christian theology should be properly understood as a kind of means-end relationship. See Tillich, "Philosophical background of my theology," (1960), *Paul Tillich. Main Works/Hauptwerke* Volume 1. Ed. Gunther Wenz. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), p.416. Also, though Tillich often mentions "existential philosophy," the notion "existence" he employing should be traced back to Greek philosophical traditions. See Tillich, "The Nature and the Significance of Existentialist Thought (1956)," *Paul Tillich. Main Works/Hauptwerke* Volume 1. Ed. Gunther Wenz. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), pp.403-410. Most important, what Tillich emphasizes when he talks about the existential character of theology is *not* the existential category provided by philosophy but the concrete and existential situation of faith in doing theology.

Therefore, to be existential is to be experiential. Ultimate concern as the focus and theme of Tillich's theological project should be understood as a kind of "mystery" experience. That's why Tillich emphasizes that "experience" is one of the most important medium for theological reflection. As a "medium" of some objective sources, human experience is which the revelatory events and happenings occur.<sup>11</sup> Tillich never mentions "human" experience, no matter how religious in substance it is, nor should thereby be regarded as the ground on which theology is built upon. Therefore, the emphasis on "human" experience as the medium of theological existence does not imply that theology would be reduced to anthropology or anthropocentric theology. For Tillich, theology should not be understood as a heteronomous religious attitude detached from the ontological ground of being. On the contrary, human self's participation into the religious substance is a must. It is exactly why Tillich insists his theology belongs to the tradition of Augustine-Franciscan ontological approach of God. It is also the reason why Tillich has sympathetic understanding of Schleiermacher's idea of "feeling of absolute dependence." Human participation cannot replace the prominent ontological role of "Christ event" because, for Tillich, divine revelation is never derived from human experience but it "is given to experience and not derived from it. Therefore, experience receives and does not produce."<sup>12</sup>

The role of experience in theological enterprise is debatable fully in the history of Reformation. In contrast to the Reformed tradition, which is likely to narrow down the scope of experience in constructing theology, Tillich seems to have more sympathetic understanding towards the radical reformers' view of the disclosure of the Holy Spirit in human inwardness and the legitimacy of human experience in theology.<sup>13</sup> For him, the former is right to base theology exclusively on Christological ground, but the latter is also valid to let numerous possibilities offered by Holy Spirit. It is important, for Tillich, that the theological participation is grounded on the Christ event but not limited by it. The truth would be disclosed continuously through the "open experience" mediated by the encounter of Christianity and other faiths. That means theological existence comes into his being within the *extendable* boundary.<sup>14</sup> It should be emphasized that, on the one hand, religious experience finds its validity within the flexibility of theological boundary; secondly, the Christ event and religious experience complements with each other. Without experience as medium, the Christian message

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.46

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Emphasis is mine.

would not be received. However, if the role of religious experience is overwhelmed by the Christ event, the transformative power generated by Spirit will be limited. If the Christ event is overwhelmed by religious experience, the particularity of Christian message will be in danger. That means neither the transformation issued by Holy Spirit in human experience is identical with the benefit from such Christ event, nor the revelatory experience creates a whole new religious message.<sup>15</sup>

It seems that for Tillich religious experience can find its validity merely because it is grasped by the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup> The correlation partaking between God's Word and human word constitutes the possibility and actuality of theological knowledge. For Tillich, "faith seeks understanding" presumes the priority of faith in the process of knowing God. However Tillich reminds that this modality of faith must be regarded as "something ultimately concern us" instead of the matter of intellectual certainty and moral actualization. And, also, this faith is nothing to do with one's status of regeneration and/or sanctification.<sup>17</sup> To sum up, for Tillich, theological existence is becoming "on the boundary" in which detached objectivity and subjective commitment are both involved. Whether an existence is "theological" depends merely within the "theological circle" to judge but the criterion to judge, whether it is inside or outside, is a matter of accepting of Christian message as the ultimate concern.<sup>18</sup>

Is *theologia irrogenitorum* possible? Can theology be done by nonbelievers? If not, would theology become the privilege of Christian community? If yes, is it still correct to uphold "faith seeks understanding"? Is "regeneration" the necessary condition of engaging in theological activity? Or theology is merely an academic discipline which is accessible opened to all intellectual participation. In answering the above questions, Tillich emphasizes, following the above understanding of theological circle and theological existence, on the one hand, that no theological involvement can be done without concrete commitment to theological circle. When a person participates in theological engagement, he / she "enters it (theological circle) as a member of the Christian church to perform one of the essential functions of the church --- its theological self-interpretation."<sup>19</sup> But, on the other hand, the *periphery* of ecclesiology is not the judge to determine the correctness of theology. As Tillich said, the *theological* character of theology is not determined by the agreement or disagreement of Christian message but whether the message is treated as ultimate

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.46

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.46

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.10

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.,p.10

concern.<sup>20</sup>

In sum, if the focus of theological circle is grounded in the *concreteness* and *particularity* of “Jesus as Christ,” then the *possibility* of involving diverse religious experience participated in the *extendable* theological circle should be established by the *universality* of Spiritual Presence in human spirit. For Tillich, faith in Jesus as Christ is grasped by Holy Spirit to achieve an ecstasy situation. In order to balance the particularity and universality of the Christian message, in his later work, the proper theological framework would be “Spirit-Christology” model under which the theological existence and theological circle would become well-grounded.

### 3. Theological Method of Theology: Correlation

For Tillich, the substance of theology is closely related to the methodology adapted. The subject matter of the theological discipline determines which method would be appropriated. If the “Spirit-Christology” is arguable to be the determination of Tillich’s theology as a whole, his method of correlation is also established through the connection with Christology and pneumatology.

In *ST*, Tillich regarded theology as “apologetic theology” or “answering theology.”<sup>21</sup>

The task of this theology

answers the questions implied in the “situation” in the power of the eternal message and with the means provided by the situation whose questions it answers.<sup>22</sup>

What apologetic theology attempts to do is to correlate the “question” implied in the situation and the “answer” provided by the Christian message. It is misleading to oppose this answering theology with Karl Barth’s kerygma theology in a sense that, for Tillich, the proclamation of Christian gospel is always situated into the heart of apologetic theology; otherwise the Christian identity would be lost in the process of dialogue and encounter. What Tillich wants to emphasize is that, in maintaining the particularity of the Christian message, kerygmatic theology will be in danger if it holds the supernatural character which is beyond the context of the gospel tries to engaged with. That’s why Tillich insists theology should be “mediating” in nature.<sup>23</sup> Another questionable criticism points to the “question-answer” relation, in that critics claim it would be in danger if the Christian answer is derived from the human situation. Actually, Tillich never claims that the Christian proclamation should be

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.7.

based on the human analysis of the situation. Rather, both of them should be in a correlated relationship. Question is always comes first but it does not derive the answer. else it would become 'begging the question'.

This method of correlation also finds its other formulation in early Tillich's development.<sup>24</sup> Religion is regarded as the depth of all cultural expression and it is not understood as a separated entity along other cultural functions. In his famous address given in the University of Berlin in 1919,<sup>25</sup> Tillich laid out his profound framework for the so-called theology of culture. He points out that theology is

the concrete and normative science of religion ... By this means two allegations are refuted. First, theology is not the science of one particular object, which we call God, among others; the *Critique of Pure Reason* put an end to this kind of science... Theology is a part of science of religion, namely the systematic and normative part. Second, theology is not a scientific presentation of a special complex of revelation. This interpretation presupposes a concept of a supernaturally authoritative revelation ...<sup>26</sup>

In order to subordinate theology as the science of religion, Tillich established a unifying system of sciences.<sup>27</sup> Under this normative and concrete consideration, the object of theology is neither the "thing-in-itself" outside the boundary of human empirical knowledge, as Kant indicated, nor the revelation understood as supernaturally unmediated through religious authorities.<sup>28</sup> Instead of objectifying the supernatural entity, the task of theology of culture attempts not to represent the idea of God as an external object but rather to achieve synthesis of culture form and the religious substance (*Gehalt*).<sup>29</sup> Revelation is not merely disclosed within the boundary of the Christian community, for Tillich, the unconditioned is manifested through the sphere of culture.<sup>30</sup> In later period, Tillich expressed this manifestation through the idea of awareness of unconditional, ultimate concern. The paradox of "absolute yes" and "absolute no" would be experienced in the revelatory breakthrough

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<sup>24</sup> John Clayton has excellent analysis on the shift of Tillich's concept of correlation from his early to later period. See J. Clayton, *The Concept of Correlation. Paul Tillich and the Possibility of a Mediating Theology* (Berlin/N.Y.: Walter de Gruyter, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> Tillich, "On the Idea of a Theology of Culture," *What is Religion?* Ed. James Luther Adams (NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), pp.155-182. New English translation, see Victor Nuovo, *Visionary Science*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp.17-40.

<sup>26</sup> Tillich, "On the Idea of a Theology of Culture," *Ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>27</sup> Tillich, *The System of Sciences*. Trans. Paul Wiebe (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981) this book was originally published in 1923.

<sup>28</sup> Tillich, "On the Idea of a Theology of Culture," *Ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>29</sup> Russell Re Manning, *Theology at the End of Culture: Paul Tillich's Theology of Culture and Art*. (Warotstraat: N.V. Peeters, 2005), p.122. For early Tillich, the whole project of the theology of culture is mainly expressed through the intra-structural relationship of "Form-Inhalt-Gehalt." For this tri-unity concept, Clayton has excellent analysis, see J. Clayton, *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> J.Heywood Thomas, *Tillich* (NY: Continuum, 2000), p.32.

into the secular forms.<sup>31</sup>

Religion is closely linked with different kinds of cultural form. For early Tillich, it is impossible to reduce religion into one of the functions of culture. That is why it would be fail to reduce religion into Hegelian reason, Kantian ethics or Schleiermacherian “feeling” (*Gefühl*). No single function of human mind can fully grasp the essence of religion, and the substance of religious can manifest through all these structures.

The present paper would argue that there is a strong continuity between early Tillich and later Tillich in his understanding of the task of theology of culture. His methodology in early period in rejecting the supernaturalist approach towards revelation is maintained in his later approach in opposing the “docetic-monophysitic traits” of Christian message.<sup>32</sup> The relevance of the Christian revelation would be sacrificed under the orthodoxy affirmation. Furthermore, Tillich’s theology of correlation finds no difficulty to affirm with Barthian criticism towards the liberal attempt to derive the theological answer from human situation. Using Tillichian terminology, the confusion of “essence” and “existence” is the real danger of 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural Protestantism. It is totally understandable for Barth, in Tillich’s understanding, to distinguish the “infinite ontological difference” between God and human.<sup>33</sup>

In rejecting Barth’s supernaturalist understanding of revelation, Tillich, by no means, abandons the concept of God as the main focus in theology as a whole and in methodological consideration in particular. Tillich insists that epistemology is grounded in ontological consideration. The way of knowing God should be sustained by the way of God’s revelation. Revelation is disclosed by God but received by human beings. That means, for Tillich, the ontological correlation between God and human being precedes the epistemological way to construe the method of correlation. The interdependence of “God for us” and “we for God” expressing the *analogia entis* is grounded in the method of correlation. It is noticed that the assumption of analogy of beings does not provide the valid way to appreciate with the natural theology in which the being of God can be derived by natural entities. For Tillich, analogy of beings sets the ontological ground to comprehend the idea of God and the world,

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<sup>31</sup> Victor Nuovo, *Visionary Science* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp.24-25.

<sup>32</sup> Tillich, ST I: 64-65.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.65. This paper cannot afford to discuss comprehensively the implication behind the relationship between Tillich’s theology, Barth and liberal theology. In short, in Tillich’s mind, under his “Protestant principle”, “liberal” and “orthodoxy” is not an “either-or” but a “both-and” relationship, and this approach is named as “neo-dialectical theology.” See Tillich, “Author’s Introduction,” *The Protestant Era*. Ed. James Luther Adams. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp.xxvi-xxviii.



analogy of faith expresses the religious dimension from human finite attitude. They are not dichotomous in nature.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. Theological Foundation of Theology: *Logos* became flesh

In answering a Kantian theological epistemological question: How is it possible to understand God? For Tillich, the term “theology” denotes all rational discourse towards *theos*, and this is merely the necessary condition but not the sufficient condition for understanding *Christian* idea of theology. The ground of Christian theology as a whole is expressed in the doctrine of “*logos* became flesh.”<sup>35</sup> This doctrine is able to identify Christian theology as *the* theology,<sup>36</sup> and “Christian theology has received a foundation which transcends the foundation of any other theology and which itself cannot be transcended.”<sup>37</sup> “*Logos* became flesh” doctrine consists of the “absolutely concrete” and the “absolutely universal” in nature.<sup>38</sup>

Christian theology is *the* theology in so far as it is based on the tension between the absolutely concrete and the absolutely universal. Priestly and prophetic theologies can be very concrete, but they lack universality. Mystical and metaphysical theologies can be very universal, but they lack concreteness.<sup>39</sup>

The absolutely concreteness represents everything particular, and the absolutely universal represents everything abstract.<sup>40</sup> For Tillich, “*logos* became flesh” integrates the universal *logos* and concrete historical human flesh under which all beings, no matter how much they are universal and/or particular, are to be included into this doctrine. In other words, Christian theology finds its own foundation in a highly inclusive ground in which everything existential would be a union within this particular and concrete flesh under a kind of personal relationship, and simultaneously, every possibility would be union with this universal and abstract cosmic *logos*.<sup>41</sup> For Tillich, this combination of universal *logos* and concrete flesh expresses a paradoxical breakthrough into human culture to manifest its own truth.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Tillich, ST I: 131. Tillich insists that the knowledge of revelation is analogous in nature because the possibility of the knowledge of God should be grounded in analogy. Also, Tillich reminds that analogy of beings should not be regarded as the way of natural theology to infer some understanding of God. It just performs the referential role like religious symbol.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis is mine.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis is the author's.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57. The concept of “breakthrough” in Tillich's theology, see Uwe Carsten Scharf, *The Paradoxical Breakthrough of Revelation. Interpreting the Divine-Human Interplay in Paul Tillich's Work 1913-1964*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999)

What Tillich concerns is not merely the traditional theological *prolegomena* question, but the possibility and actuality of the validity of Christian theology outside the boundary of Christian community.

Whether there is a theology outside Christianity and, if so, whether or not the idea of theology is fulfilled in Christian theology in a perfect and final way.

Indeed, this is what Christian theology claims; but is it more than a claim, a natural expression of the fact that the theologian works within the theological circle? Has it any validity beyond the periphery of the circle? It is the task of apologetic theology to prove that the Christian claim also has validity from the point of view of those outside the theological circle. Apologetic theology must show that trends which are immanent in all religions and cultures move towards the Christian answers. This refers both to doctrines and to the theological interpretation of theology.<sup>43</sup>

It seems that Tillich is trying hard to find a theological justification to set Christian theology on the boundary between Christianity and non-Christian religions. And this justification can provide a function of guarantee for the validity well-situated inside and outside of Christianity. Therefore, it is understandable why Tillich unifies the principle of universality and particularity to fulfill the requirement of the validity outside of Christianity and inside of Christianity respectively. In order to fulfill the requirement of crossing the boundary of theological circle, the principle of universality provides the proper legitimacy to justify the validity of Christian message outside the Christian community. At the same time, in order to fulfil the requirement of identification of theological existence, the principle of particularity provides the justification within the theology circle. Therefore, the focus and the periphery of theological circle are both fulfilled in the doctrine of “*logos* became flesh”.

The above analysis can be explained comprehensively in the dialectical formulation between theology and philosophy. For Tillich, the difference between these two activities is grounded in the respective resource. Philosophy assumes the structure of universal *logos* in which both human mind and universe are shared under the goal of philosophy. For Tillich, it is the union of human subjective *logos* and objective *logos*. On the contrary, theology submits itself under the concrete *logos*, fleshly *logos*. It requires a concrete commitment towards it.<sup>44</sup> However, these two activities are sharing the common basic structure; a philosopher is a hidden theologian in a sense that “his existential situation and his ultimate concern shape his philosophical vision. He is a theologian to the degree that his intuition of the universal *logos* of the

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<sup>43</sup> Tillich, ST I:15.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.23.

structure of reality as a whole is formed by a particular *logos* which appears to him in his particular place and reveals to him the meaning of the whole.”<sup>45</sup> What Tillich wants to mention is not, in an actual sense, that philosophy is identical with theology, but, in a potential sense philosophy is theologically-orientated. On the other way round, if theological attitude tries to stake a universal validity, it should keep a detached distance from its existential commitment and extend obedience to the universal *logos*. If so, theology will be philosophically-orientated.<sup>46</sup> To be critical is to be obliged. Therefore, the mission of a theologian is to

take the risk of being driven beyond the boundary line of the theological circle ... Theology, since it serves not only the concrete but also the universal *logos*, can become a stumbling block for the church and a demonic temptation for the theologian. The detachment required in honest theological work can destroy the necessary involvement of faith. This tension is the burden and the greatness of every theological work.<sup>47</sup>

In sum, the philosophical realm and theological realm are totally different but overlapped. As Tillich said, they are neither in conflict nor in a synthesis.<sup>48</sup>

It is clear for Tillich to formulate the material content of Christian theology as the combination of universality and particularity in the doctrine of the incarnation. The role of this material substance is to provide the justification for theological existence coming across the periphery/boundary of theological circle. In the following, the incarnation will show the same function constructing the formal criteria of Christian theology. Tillich emphasizes that the object of theology, firstly, is “what concern us ultimately.”<sup>49</sup> Negatively speaking, this criterion defends the independence of different human activities through the distinction of “ultimate concern” and “preliminary concern.” However, these two types of concerns are not in a polarity. “In and through every preliminary concern the ultimate concern can actualize itself.” If so, the preliminary concern would become the object of theology.<sup>50</sup> Positively speaking, all beings in the world that’s inherent with ultimate concern are qualified to be the object of theology.<sup>51</sup> That means, for Tillich, nothing should be excluded outside the theological circle as the second formal criterion shows that those things that determine our “being or non-being” should be regarded as the object of theology.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp.25-26.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

These two formal theological criteria provide the justification for the validity of crossing the periphery/boundary of theological circle. The material content of these two criterions is concrete and particular but the boundary is extendable and universal. In the volume one of *ST*, Tillich grounded his whole theology of correlation in the doctrine of Logos Christology in which, he argues that the requirements of universality and particularity can find their fulfillments in this doctrine. And we will find that this theological foundation, Logos Christology, will be replaced by pneumatology in the volume three of *ST*. It seems that, for Tillich, the doctrine of Holy Spirit is more capable of fulfilling the above double requirements, both universality and particularity provided by “*logos became flesh.*”

##### 5. From *Logos* Christology to Spirit-Christology

The doctrine of Spirit plays an important role in Tillich’s system, not only because it correlates God’s spirit and human spirit as the system intends to work out, but also it reconsiders the foundation of Tillich’s entire theology of correlation.<sup>53</sup> Then, in what ways can this later doctrinal development replace Tillich’s original intention in founding theology on *Logos* Christology?

Firstly, Tillich articulates that *logos* Christology trends to emphasis on the transformation of divine *logos* to become human; but that adoptionist Christology will emphasize more on the divine *logos* that dwells into human Jesus.<sup>54</sup> The reason why Tillich, in his volume one of *ST*, focused merely on the former and based his theological methodology on it may be partly explained by his consideration of the “universality” and “particularity” given by the transformation Christology suggested to him. However, at that time, Tillich didn’t consider the question of how the “universal” *becomes* “particular.”<sup>55</sup> It may explain why, in his seminar on the history of Christian thought after the publication of volume one, Tillich just merely mentioned both types of Christology but never considered the possibility of how to synthesis them.<sup>56</sup>

Secondly, when Tillich was moving forward to the volume two of his *ST*, Christology was reconsidered in a much broader and deeper way, at least in two directions. On one

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<sup>53</sup> It is widely known that, Tillich himself disappointed with, the volume three of *Systematic Theology* is fragmentary, inadequate and questionable (ST III: Preface), but he never explained the reason. LAI Pan-chiu provides an excellent analysis on the impact of pneumatology to let Tillich reconsiders the validity of entire theological method of correlation. See Pan-chiu LAI, *Towards a trinitarian theology of religions : a study of Paul Tillich's thought* (Kampen, The Netherlands : Kok Pharos, 1994)

<sup>54</sup> Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*. Ed. Carl E. Braaten (NY: A Touchbook Book, 1967), p.80.

<sup>55</sup> This ‘how-become’ question would be reopened in volume three of Tillich’s *Systematic Theology*, see Tillich, ST III:144.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

hand, Tillich pushes forward his criticism of the Chalcedonian definition of two-natures Christology, and at the same time, he considers the complementarity of *Logos* Christology and adoptionist Christology.<sup>57</sup> For him, the basic question of Christology is how to maintain the Christ-character and Jesus-character expressed in “Jesus as the Christ.” That means, Tillich is using another type of Christological language to continue the discussion of universality and particularity expressed in volume one. And, the idea of “New Being” is adapted as an innovation to express the divine principle actualized in a concrete and historical life. The complementarity would be expressed that *logos* Christology was needed to explain the adoptionist Christology and, also, the former needs the latter for its fulfilment.<sup>58</sup> Under the existential consideration, Christology should be soteriological in nature in the sense that who God is should be totally depends on who fully participated in man’s existential predicament.<sup>59</sup> It seems that is why Tillich tends to employ a Hegelian Christological framework in which in the man Jesus as the Christ is the eternal unity of God and man, and this eternal unity has become historical reality.<sup>60</sup> In abandoning understanding the incarnation as metamorphosis, his Hegelian model trends to emphasize on the divine unity of Godmanhood manifested in a personal life.

From volume one to volume two, we find that Tillich’s Christology undergoes a shift from an emphasis on the *logos* Christology to an “eternal God-man-unity” in which he tries to balance the essential tension between the incarnational and adoptionist aspect of Christology. In order to emphasize on a personal life which is full of authentic human condition, the individuality and concreteness of Jesus as the Christ should not be ignored. In is interesting that, in volume two, when discussing *how logos* changes into a human being, Tillich seldom uses the word, *became*, instead “manifestation” and “participation” become the key words in describing the mechanism that happened in the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>61</sup>

What surprises us in Tillich’s volume three of *ST* is not only that he tries to reconceive the doctrine of Christology through the language of pneumatology, but that the idea of “Spiritual Presence” throws new light on the unresolved questions resident in

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<sup>57</sup> Tillich, *ST II*: 138-150. It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the first criticism on Chalcedon Christology. Simply speaking, Tillich adapts the dynamic relational model of “eternal God-man-unity” to replace traditional static “two natures in one person” model. See, Tillich, “A Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Incarnation,” *Paul Tillich. Main Works/Hauptwerke*. Volume 6. Ed. Gert Hummel (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), pp.305-318.

<sup>58</sup> Tillich, *ST II*:149.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.146.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.146. See Cameron Bruce J.R., “The Hegelian Christology of Paul Tillich,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* Volume 29 (1976), pp.27-48.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.148-150.

preceding volumes. It should be noted that Tillich's ambition as to put the polemical burden heavily on the doctrine of the Spirit.<sup>62</sup> The most important development, it will be shown, that the complementarity of the universality and particularity of *logos* Christology mentioned in volume one would be perfectly reformulated and resolved under the framework of Spirit-Christology in volume three of *ST*.

Spirit-Christology means "divine Spirit was present in Jesus as the Christ without distortion."<sup>63</sup> For Tillich, this aspect of Christology was shown in the synoptic gospels and Pauline tradition. Firstly, all the stories recorded in synoptic traditions express that Spirit directed and empowered Jesus to fulfill his mission. This configuration of Jesus "possessed" by Holy Spirit, according to Tillich, succeeds as an important step in responding to the how-question remained unanswered in Volume Two. The particularity of Jesus' own personal life was "procreated" by the divine Spirit.<sup>64</sup>

This story was justified by the insight into the psychosomatic level at which the Spirit Presence works and the legitimate conclusion that there must have been a teleological predisposition in Jesus to become the bearer of the Spirit without limit.<sup>65</sup>

In order to maintain the authentic humanity of Jesus, Tillich tends to shift his Christological orientation into adoptionist approach, otherwise it would be dangerous to deprive Jesus of his full humanity in the so-called "crypto-Monophysitic" tendency of Christology.<sup>66</sup> The human side of faith and love of the man Jesus would be regarded as the state of being grasped by the Spiritual Presence and through it by the transcendent union of unambiguous life.<sup>67</sup> For Tillich, even though Jesus experienced the ambiguous and fragmentary state of faith, the "transcendent union of unambiguous life" bears him up.<sup>68</sup>

Actually, in order to emphasis on the idea that divine power manifests within the human structure but not destroys it, Tillich has to reconstruct a rather dynamic and interpenetrated vision of reality. Under this holistic and organic vision, the differentiation of all beings is not classified as different "levels" but "dimensions." The understanding of Spirit-Christology is well grounded in his idea of "multi-dimensional unity of life." The metaphor, *dimension*, that Tillich employs

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<sup>62</sup> Tillich, *ST* III:5

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.144.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.145.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.146.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

represents the essential relationship among all kinds of being are not in “mutual interference,” and they cross without disturbing each other and finds no conflicts among dimensions. Therefore, no “hierarchical” levels are implied.<sup>69</sup> Under this organic and integrated unity of the whole, the dimensions of divine Spirit and human spirit in Jesus are not separated from each other and their own substances can penetrate into each dimension. That’s why “the doctrine of the multidimensional unity of life answers the question of the psychosomatic basis of the bearer of the Spirit without such ambiguity.”<sup>70</sup>

Back to the question of theological existence and theological circle, if the groundwork of the particularity and universality involved in theological circle is formally and materially based on “*logos* became flesh” in volume one of *ST*, then, because of the development of “Divine Spirit dwelling in Jesus’ spirit” articulated in volume three, the particularity and universality question would be dealt with by pneumatology. It should be noted that the flexibility of the boundary of theological circle is not defensible perfectly under the original idea of *logos* Christology whose main focus is tentatively placed on the particularity of divine revelation in Jesus Christ. If “open experience” should be allowed and theology could be worked out outside the theological circle, the universality character demonstrated by pneumatology would be more appropriated than *logos* Christology to tackle this theological existence. Though Tillich coupled pneumatology and Christology together, it is obvious and nuanced that the orientation of volume three of *ST* was shifted to emphasize on the universal spiritual and theonomous manifestations into humankind in general and Jesus Christ in particular.

## 6. Reconsidering the problem of *Church* Theology

If theology is the function of the Christian church,<sup>71</sup> the question concerning the nature and boundary of theology would be partly answered through the understanding of the idea of the church. For Tillich, there is no ground to separate the theology of culture and ecclesiastical theology.

The theology of culture acknowledges the necessity of the concrete standpoint in its continuity, and the church theologian in turn acknowledges the relativity of every concrete form compared with the exclusive absoluteness of the religious principle itself.<sup>72</sup>

The complementarity of the language of “universal-particular” occurred once again

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<sup>69</sup> Tillich, *ST* III:15.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.145.

<sup>71</sup> Tillich, *ST* I:3.

<sup>72</sup> Tillich, “On the Idea of a Theology of Culture,” *Ibid.*, p.178.

in the early Tillich. From the side of church theologian, the particularity and concreteness of the Christian substance should be always reexamined and relativized through the universal and critical principle.

In the volume three of *ST*, Tillich articulates his ecclesiology under the idea of Spiritual Presence. The church as the new creation is created under the power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Like all beings, the life of church is ambiguous in the sense that essence and existence are both present. Therefore, Tillich trends to identify the essential nature of church as “spiritual community” which should not be regarded as the existential and empirical existence of “church.” “Spiritual community” under the impact of Spiritual Presence embodies the power of New Being and overcomes the ambiguous state of all kinds of religious life.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, spiritual community by nature should not be identical with some visible and physical community but is regarded as certain spiritual power and meaning inherent *within* these communities, as Martin Luther mentioned spiritual community is invisible, hidden and open to faith only.<sup>74</sup> That means the relationship between spiritual community and the visible church is analogous to religious substance (*Gehalt*) and its cultural form. The former expressing the spiritual power and meaningful substance through the physical and external formal structures, would remain the hidden stage within different communities when Jesus as Christ is still unnoticed.

The dialectical tension between spiritual community and church is fully expressed in the parallel concepts of “latent” and “manifested” community.<sup>75</sup> Both of them are non-identical but not separated. Spiritual community refers to the latent mode of theological existence within the church *and also outside* the church.<sup>76</sup>

The term “latent” comprise a negative and a positive element. Latency is the state of being partly actual, partly potential; one cannot attribute latency to that which is merely potential ...In the state of latency, there must be actualized elements and elements not actualized.<sup>77</sup>

It is clear that, for Tillich, the distinction between Christian church and other secular communities is not absolute in the sense that both are universally empowered by

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<sup>73</sup> Tillich, *ST* III: 149-150

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150. When Tillich refers Luther on the invisible church, the invisible and visible characters of the church are not in dichotomy but the former should actualize through the latter. See, Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1967), p.252. For Tillich’s comment on the Reformation, see G. Lindbeck, “An Assessment Reassessed: Paul Tillich on the Reformation,” *The Journal of Religion* Vol. 63, No.4 (1983), pp.376-393.

<sup>75</sup> Actually, according to Tillich, the distinction between “latent” and “manifestation” was early developed in the essay called “*Kirche und humanistische Gesellschaft.*” However, pneumatology was still remaining underdeveloped. See, Tillich, *On the Boundary*, p.66.

<sup>76</sup> Tillich, *ST* III:152-155.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.153.



Spiritual Presence, and that the ultimate criterion for distinguishing them is actually located in the self-negation and self-transformation manifested by the Christological Protestant principle.<sup>78</sup>

Through the analysis of pneumatology, Tillich's formulation of the tension between the periphery and the focus of theological circle in volume one is rearticulated in volume three as the tension between latency and manifestation of Spiritual community. Though the framework of "Spirit-Christology" remaining as the heart of the whole system, Pneumatology is undoubtedly providing the theological validity for the notion of theological existence outside the boundary of the church. Although Tillich was maintaining the balance between Christology and pneumatology, as he emphasizes that the spiritual community is the community of the New Being and it is created by the divine Spirit as manifest in the New Being in Jesus as the Christ,<sup>79</sup> the community of faith and love is no longer exclusively understood within the tradition of Christian church. If so, the so-called Church Theology should be understood in a much broader way to include different kinds of theological existence embodied within a universal vision under the impact of Spiritual Presence.

Also, in order to relativize the concrete and absolute focus of the theological circle, Tillich's self-negation of the Protestant principle is applied to express the conquest of religion in self-elevation. Under the impact of his pneumatology, Spiritual Presence is not only regarded as the embodiment of spiritual grace and presence but also formulated as the criterion to critique the demonization and profanization of such embodiment.<sup>80</sup> As Tillich mentions that the Protestant principle is a manifestation of the prophetic Spirit.<sup>81</sup> The original Christological language of the paradox of Jesus' death on the cross expressed in the Protestant principle is clearly resolved in the pneumatological language of the spiritual presence of graceful embodiment and prophetic criticism. This is the meaning of Tillich's combination of Protestant principle and Catholic substance.

#### 7. Towards a Trinitarian Pneumatological Perspective

It is obvious that the entire correlation method and its theological understanding of the relationship between Christian faith and culture are grounded in the doctrine of Logos Christology which attempts to correlate the concrete and particular on one hand and the universal and abstract on the other hand. This paper has showed that, within his

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.154.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.155.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.245.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

systematic development, Tillich's Christology underwent a shift in orientation from a transformational perspective to an adoptionist approach. In preserving the authentic dimension of the human Jesus, Tillich's Christology is inevitably coupled with pneumatology in order to correlate Jesus' authentic spiritual dimension and the divine spiritual presence. However, it is showed that, when pneumatology is successfully replacing the language of Christology provided, the question of an imbalanced over-emphasis on the universality informed by universalizing pneumatology emerges. This is exactly the reverse problematic situation of an over-emphasis on the particularity informed by *Logos* Christology. Perhaps this is the reason for Tillich's dissatisfaction with his final system.

Neither logos Christology nor Spirit Christology can keep the well balance of the key polarity of "concreteness-universality" as the ground and nature of theology. However, this paper would suggest that the idea of a Trinitarian pneumatology would service as an embracing symbol to resolve the tension developed by "concreteness-universality" in the dialectical life process within God as Spirit.

For Tillich, God is Spirit and God has spirit. That means, God's being is essentially a living Spirit. In the volume one of *ST*, Tillich emphasizes on the importance of pneumatology for considering the ground of the idea of God.

The situation is different if we do not ask the question of the Christian doctrines but rather the question of the *presuppositions* of these doctrines in an idea of God. Then we must speak about the Trinitarian principles, and *we must begin with the Spirit rather than with the Logos.*<sup>82</sup>

For Tillich, the primary symbol for describing the absolute and abysmal nature of God is Spirit, which implies divine life undergoes a dialectical life process in which the triune God "separate and reunite simultaneously."<sup>83</sup> Also, this Trinitarian life process, as Trinitarian principle, would express different and embracing symbols of the self-manifestation of the divine life to human being.<sup>84</sup> Tillich's concern is *not* the Christian doctrine of trinity but the presupposition of this doctrine, which means that the essential being of God's self-manifestation is expressed through this symbol. First, Godhead as the first principle expresses the abyss of the divine and the power of being infinitely resisting nonbeing. Secondly, logos principle as regarded as God's self-objectification represents the meaning and structure of this symbol. Thirdly, Spirit is regarded as the mediating principle to unite the power in the first one and the meaning of the second in it. In a holistic sense, Spirit is the whole and the dynamic

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<sup>82</sup> Tillich, *ST* I:250. Italics are mine.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.242.

<sup>84</sup> Tillich, *ST* III: 294.

living process within the Godhead.<sup>85</sup>

The Spirit as God's living as well as Trinitarian process is fully dynamic in self-manifestation in which the "Spirit in whom God 'goes out from' himself, the Spirit proceeds from the divine ground. He gives actuality to that which is potential in the divine ground and 'outspoken' in the divine logos."<sup>86</sup> It should be noted that, under this Trinitarian principle, Spirit participates into the particularity of Jesus as Christ. The Spirit as the Spirit of Christ means that the universality expressed by the Spirit is fully and authentically coupled with the particularity of the man Jesus. Also, the Spirit reuniting the separated means that the outspoken incarnated particular logos would be reunited with the Godhead through the Spirit. Through this reuniting process, the postexistence Christ regains the universality. Therefore, under this Trinitarian process, the "concreteness-universality" starts its dialectical balance in the historical life of Jesus generated by Holy Spirit, and completes the process in the exalted Christ.

In Tillich's 1913 Systematic Theology,<sup>87</sup> the above Trinitarian principle was firstly articulated. In the beginning of the part of dogmatics, God is articulated as tri-unity living God, this tri-unity expresses the unity of the infinite manifoldness.<sup>88</sup> For Tillich, "since the appropriate arrangement of the dogmatics is given through the different moments of the concept of God, it is necessary to place the trinity at the beginning of the dogmatic system, ... since out of this reason each Main part of the system has a direct relation to the trinity, so the trinity has to be discussed also at the mid-point of the System (Christology) and at the end of the System."<sup>89</sup> It seems that, in Tillich early consideration on his systematic theology, doctrine of Trinity should not be interpreted as only one doctrine among the others, but it should be the underlying grounding principle for the whole system. That means his systematic theology in his original decision is wholly Trinitarian.

Under the above Trinitarian principle, the incarnated logos expresses the outward moment of Godhead and represents the concrete and determined moment. "Through the exaltation of Christ, the tension is overcome in which the unity of God and with the historical Jesus realized, and whose completion was the cross."<sup>90</sup> The doctrine of exaltation of Christ was never fully explored in Tillich's mature *ST*. However, the

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<sup>85</sup> Tillich, *ST* I:251.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Tillich, "Systematische Theologie of 1913," English translation, see Uwe Carsten Scharf, *The Paradoxical Breakthrough of Revelation. Interpreting the Divine-Human Interplay in Paul Tillich's Work 1913-1964*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), pp.335-478.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.385.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.386.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.417-418.

tension or dialectical relationship of “concrete-universality” would be solved in the Trinitarian principle in general and the symbol of the exaltation of Christ in particular. The historical particular human Jesus is exalted to heaven through the Spirit. In Tillich’s language, “the Son is the immediate unity of all divine fullness, while in the historical life of Jesus, the unity of God with the Son maintains itself even though the tension that the singularity had brought in, in the unity of God with the exalted Christ, the tension is overcome, but the moment of singularity is preserved, however, no longer as an opposing factor that has to be overcome but as a justified and redeemed moment.”<sup>91</sup>

## 8. Conclusion

This paper attempts to demonstrate that the key motif “particularity-universality” offered by Tillich in order to ground the whole theological system in general and theological methodology in particular upon it is not fully successful within his system, on the one hand. However, his Trinitarian pneumatology, which is clearly showed in his early 1913 theological consideration and partly mentioned in his mature system, plays a promising and embracing theological symbol to successfully emphasizing on the particularity of Spirit’s indwelling in the human Jesus, and on the universality of the risen Lord Jesus in his exaltation through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the polarity of “particularity-universality” is interchangeable within the framework of the pneumatological particularity and Christological universality.

Therefore, the Trinitarian ground of theological circle and theology of culture would be well formed. The office of Holy Spirit not only provides the legitimate ground for the extension of the theological circle, but also enriches the particularity of Jesus as the Christ. Also, Jesus as Christ in turn provides the universal and cosmic vision of the uniqueness of Christian message in the universalizing of the Spiritual Presence. As Tillich said, due to the openness of the doctrine of Trinity, the Trinitarian conception of theological thinking must be also open and not fixed.

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