

The Emergence of Salvation

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In the first paper for CTI's Pastor-Theologian program, I held close to the observation that salvation in Christ, whatever else might be said of it, is a category of consciousness; that is, its goodness depends on awareness of it. Even if one proclaims salvation as a reality for persons incapable of apprehending it, whether for reasons of immaturity, disability, or cultural separation, the proclamation directly affects only those who consider it consciously. Therefore, the paper held that when one experiences a positive relationship with what she calls the presence of God overcoming her limitations, this relationship partially heals or transcends that rift in her self-experience as a limited, contingent, even broken, being. When such experience is "mediated through the symbol of Jesus Christ as Savior, [this] awareness of self-transcendence is what salvation is."¹

Given this definition, the place of the church in salvation is to awaken people to the possibility of transcendence, or transformation, "in Christ." To qualify transformation as being *in Christ* means that the symbols which the church uses for its work of awakening are received from the Christian tradition, specifically through the scriptures and the sacraments of the church. Although the church can and should acquaint itself with and honor many and diverse expressions for the work of healing and transcendence in other spiritual traditions, the concrete work of the church of Jesus Christ involves teaching, practicing, and perfecting its own language continually. This need not entangle the people of the church in arguing that the Christian teaching and practice for transformation is the only true doctrine. For the sake of the world, the church need only have confidence in its message and its path. This confidence is to be derived from experience with practices that have been found reliable in orienting individuals toward the gifts of God in Christ. Having that, its work is clear.

Its work is not at all straightforward, however, for the church does not possess God's gifts and cannot give them. Its people can only learn and teach practices which have been tried and found helpful in preparing the mind and heart to receive transformative experiences which the community itself confirms as gifts of God's grace. Many Christians disagree strongly with this statement, however. Arguing from the implications of Matthew 16:19, wherein Jesus is said to give to Peter "the keys of the kingdom of heaven, so that whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven," some traditions argue that the church does indeed have authority to open or close the doors of transformation and salvation. Many hold to the theory that these forensic determinations are effective eternally.

The preponderant teaching of the scriptures does not support this extreme interpretation drawn from a single verse of the scriptural deposit. Taken as a whole, the gospel portraits completely undermine the theory that the church has powers or gifts that can condition a person's transformation in God. To afflicted persons who have no conception of his cross and resurrection, let alone of his church, Jesus repeatedly affirms that "your *faith* has saved you." More decisive is Paul's teaching that salvation is by grace through faith. Add to that the Johannine understanding about new birth in the Spirit and the coming of the Paraclete to guide and inspire the faithful. In all these teachings, salvation is understood as an action of God only. Returning to the gospel portrait, Jesus time and again expresses intense dismay at how the leaders of the dominant religious institutions interpose themselves in the divine-human relationship. This rejection of human authorities who usurp divine causal powers is, of course, the heart of the "Protestant principle."

Yet Protestantism has ultimately provided no protection from the error of relying on the authority of the church to provide salvation. To the contrary, baptism or membership in the church are widely understood among church adherents as effective means for acquiring the rewards that God will

ultimately give to the saved. Many believers think of salvation as an ontological status in a binary system of existence; for a given individual, they assume, salvation is on or off. People so minded naturally want to view themselves as saved and feel obliged by the logic of their faith to assume that others are not saved due to some error of thought or action which has set them outside the true church. When a person believes that the church, or her status in the church, effects salvation, a relationship to God as the power of transformation is vitiated in an unreflective acceptance of cheap grace, which destroys the dynamic of the human will in the narrative of transformation.

This manner of Christian believing is widespread. An adequate understanding of the place of the church in salvation must at a minimum make sense of this mode of belief, without disparaging such adherents or privileging their theories simply because those who hold them are numerous. It will be the argument of this paper that this form of religious belief is best understood as a stage in the development of consciousness, both in terms of historical social development and in terms of personal spiritual development. It will further be argued that the precipitous decline of church participation over the last half century is related to widespread rejection of this manner of believing; that the abandonment of the church, far from being a simple error of unbelief, is also a stage in the development of the consciousness of salvation, both in terms of historical social development and of personal faith development; and that the number of persons who have been moved beyond this rationalist/rejectionist stage of development may be a sufficiently numerous and critical mass that they can accept and develop a re-formed and inspired Christian tradition where the totality of personality as a center of value and will is intentionally engaged in the salvation narrative.

When a church acknowledges that it has no spiritual possessions and no power to loose or to bind anyone, but that its only place in the work of salvation is as guide with a hope and a story to tell and a kindling invitation to others to come practice its methods and learn its language, then a highly consequential re-ordering of theology and anthropology can follow—one that can reconfigure the “next church” to serve an *historically* new developmental stage in the narrative of salvation in the Western context. The teachers and participants of such churches have come to the understanding that their relationship to transformation in Christ—to salvation—is exactly not a binary status, whether on or off, but a thoroughly paradoxical one. The paradox lies in embracing both human will and divine will (grace) as *fully* active in the salvation narrative. Engaged with this paradox existentially, the believer acknowledges herself as “in Christ” precisely *because* she knows that she has not achieved and cannot acquire any divine status or gifts for her possession, and does not think herself complete, and yet nevertheless knows that she can, does, and must act in her own highest interest; must press on for still fuller consciousness of the gifts of God in Christ—

not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3.12)

When salvation is understood not as a forensic verdict but as a relationship to the possibility of transformation in Christ, the developmental or stage-like character of faith and consciousness is affirmed. When a person understands that movement through a next stage of spiritual progression is possible, he benefits not only from knowing the “true happiness”² of doing with his own will the will of God, but also from seeing himself as not different from anyone (or perhaps even from any thing), in that all are found on the path of possibility in the grace of God, regardless how they may be disposed along that path. When a critical mass of church participants use a map of spiritual

development such as this to understand their vocation, the place of that church in salvation becomes clear: to encourage people in the movement and development of their faith, or Christ-consciousness, through the next discrete stage.

The church that accepts this work needs certain equipment. First, they need to clarify their definition of what a stage of development in Christ is. Second, they need to inquire into and discover the language and practices most helpful to participants at particular stages of development. Large amounts of psychological and spiritual wisdom will be needed to perceive the immense creativity of the ego in devising resistance to another death and another birth in the Spirit as leaders call their people, individually and collectively, to answer the command of the Lord: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

This paper focuses on possibilities and means for transformation of the church in the North American context. This focus is not intended to minimize the importance of teaching and affirming Christian doctrines and traditions to new adherents. Indeed, understanding that the meaning of salvation changes with developmental stages must confirm the church in beginning at the beginning with beginners, regardless of their age. Within the narrow scope of this paper, however, we will only examine the risks of formally affirming doctrines and traditions without acknowledging spiritual and developmental processes. Such formalism has led many to reject church language and symbols. Any church not disturbed by the departure of a generation or two from its midst has abandoned its commitment to making peace with all nations and peoples. Focus on reformation and transformation is the needed corrective.

The cultural division in the West is often said to be between religious and secular views of reality. This typing sheds no light on the underlying humanity of the types, since the terms are mutually exclusive, as if the opposite of each were an alien creature. Seeing both types as coordinates of development in consciousness, or development in faith, on the other hand, while perhaps unpalatable to the persons so identified, maintains all people in an essential unity, in spite of their differences. This perceptual unity can be of no small interest to a church more committed to its own transformation in the kingdom of God than to declaring victories over opponents.

A developmental understanding of the rift between so-called religious and secular world views holds that people at a given stage of faith development will tend to gather together in communities. Because churches and political parties are primarily organized around values, they, more than other kinds of popular voluntary societies, tend to express one level of development to the exclusion of others.³ This phenomenon is inevitable in politics, for if a substantial part of the population can be fairly described as being at a given stage of faith—or consciousness—development, members of that cohort will endeavor to express their values politically, rather than let groups with other world views rule them. Furthermore, if through the course of history, a given culture is shaped by newly forming critical masses of individuals at the next higher level of development, it follows that at any given moment in history, the great political tension in that culture will primarily be expressed *between* the two largest groupings of developmental stages.

Although this separation of groups according to levels of consciousness is inevitable in politics, it presents grave challenges to the church, where formal, intentional disunity or opposition confuse the witness of the church to its own adherents and to the world, obfuscating the meaning of salvation itself. To the degree that parishes of the Roman Catholic church are still organized geographically,

that tradition resists the destructive disunity symbolized and actualized by local churches when they stratify into enclaves of class or culture or faith development. Writing to her mentor Fr. Perrin, Simone Weil compared the Catholic Church to a great manger with “food at every level, so that the tallest creature and the smallest can equally come to feed there.”⁴ As loyalty to denominational traditions has withered, the Protestant churches have almost no means to resist the desires of individuals to assemble only with their own kind if possible. This is especially the case in American culture, which places an especially high value on one’s ability to choose what pleases and to quit what displeases, including, of course, one’s church. George Lindbeck, among others, used the term “experiential-expressivism” to name this development in the liberal world-view of the West.

It is much easier in our day for religious interests to take the experiential-expressive form of individual quests for personal meaning . . . The structures of modernity press individuals to meet God first in the depths of their souls and then, perhaps, if they find something personally congenial, to become part of a tradition or join a church . . . Thus the traditions of religious thought and practice into which Westerners are most likely to be socialized conceal them from the social origins of their conviction that religion is a highly private and individual matter.⁵

The decay of the Protestant churches in the twentieth century is a function of a separation of traditions along lines of faith development just as predictable as is political separation along those same lines. The separation in the churches is far more inimical, however, for the church cannot present a hope of salvation as transformative when people cut themselves off from the changeful possibility of learning to love people quite unlike themselves.

Let us turn to a brief account of the major shifts in faith- or consciousness- development in the pre-modern and modern period. The culture stands at an historic divide. To one side flow streams of the Christian tradition which rise from pre-modern assumptions about truth and the authority for making truth claims. James Fowler called this “mythic-literal faith.”⁶ Here, it is axiomatic that the words of the Bible and the church’s teachers and teachings directly contain and can directly convey what is needful for salvation, the highest form of happiness. To the other side of the divide flow the streams of modern rationalism, which rise from the discovery that each person has or is his own center of authority for making truth claims. Here, it is axiomatic that no book or person can determine what is required for the highest happiness; to the contrary, people must make their own way through life’s hazards. Some will form communities of agreement on the terms for finding happiness and call their discoveries “the truth.” Others will not. The formation of the scientific/rational level of consciousness is usually not identified as a “stage of faith” among Christian developmental theorists for the simple reason that many people abandon religious identification when they enter upon this way of seeing; hence, traditional mythic-literalist believers apply the “secular” label. Nevertheless, what Fowler calls “individuated-reflective faith” clearly shares this centering of authority in a new understanding of the self.

The rise of individuated-reflective faith is occasioned by a variety of experiences that make it necessary for persons to objectify, examine, and make critical choices about the defining elements of their identity and faith . . . There must be a shift in the grounding and orientation of the self [and] . . . there must be an objectification and critical choosing of one’s beliefs, values, and commitments, which come to be taken as a systemic unity.⁷

In Western societies, the rise of the rational level of consciousness into a significant cultural force is associated with the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, but large numbers of people did not organize their world at this level of development until the nineteenth century. One continuing expression of the division between mythic-literal and rational-level consciousness is the disdain that both sides bear toward one another. Mythic literalists hold that rational-level people are

simply seeking their own way, in rebellion against God. Modern rationalists are appalled that anyone is still so naïve about her own psychological nature as to believe that the God she imagines is literally out there somewhere planning futures for humans and punishing or scolding them for disobedience while rewarding the well-behaved.

A half-century ago, Tillich identified these oppositions as outcomes of more or less exclusive reliance on *heteronomous* or *autonomous* reason.

Historically, autonomous reason has liberated and maintained itself in a never-ending fight with heteronomy. Heteronomy imposes a strange (*heteros*) law (*nomos*) on one or all of the functions of reason. It issues commands from “outside” on how reason should grasp and shape reality. But this “outside” is not merely outside. It represents, at the same time, an element in reason itself, namely, the depth of reason. This makes the fight between autonomy and heteronomy dangerous and tragic. It is finally a conflict in reason itself . . . A heteronomous authority usually expresses itself in terms of myth and cult because these are the direct and intentional expressions of the depth of reason. Heteronomy in this sense is usually a reaction against an autonomy which has lost its depth and has become empty and powerless. But as a reaction it is destructive, denying to reason the right of autonomy and destroying its structural laws from outside.⁸

Stuck at this divide, the Christian churches in North America are unable to proclaim their message outside their clans. Tillich’s review of 2,500 years of oscillation between the slopes of heteronomous and autonomous reason lends welcome perspective to the rancor of moral, political, and religious fights between left- and right-wing partisans in our day. Indeed, that perspective could be an argument for the inevitability of the contention and the futility of struggling to improve the terms of the discourse. Being at a divide, however, does not require a sojourner to choose for either slope. As Tillich put it, “The fight against an empty autonomy and a destructive heteronomy makes the quest for a new theonomy as urgent today as it was at the end of the ancient world. The catastrophe of autonomous reason is complete. Neither autonomy nor heteronomy, isolated and in conflict, can give the answer.”⁹

The world-historical oscillation between heteronomous and autonomous reason begs a question. Is this only the back-and-forth of a perennial feud motivated by that self-assertion of the ego which has ruled some of the inner provinces of human beings in every epoch of history? Or is it a dialectic whose movement ‘round-and-round can be seen, from a different perspective, as an upward spiral, generating new syntheses and developing historically new modes of social knowing and being, which emerge in critical masses of individuals at higher levels of consciousness? Contemporary church battles suggest the former interpretation. Partisans speak about their struggles in terms that imply expectation of nothing new under the sun, as powers struggle to protect, or avoid, what was. Some want to “go back” to a better time; others refuse to allow “retrograde” thinking to “drag us back” to a benighted time. This “flatland” thinking, concerned about power more than truth, may best be explained as a symptom of a culture stuck in its rivalry between two modes of consciousness, each of which thinks itself at the summit of human development.

Some data, on the other hand, argue for a genuine historical development emerging from the contention between heteronomous and autonomous reason. In her history of fundamentalism in the great religious cultures of the West,¹⁰ Karen Armstrong uses the terms *mythos* and *logos* (in direct parallel to Tillich’s heteronomy and autonomy) in an astonishingly detailed examination of a shifting battleground. Where *logos* functions to give the reasoning subject access to the objective world, *mythos* functions to connect the subject to depth and meaning in her experience of her world. Fundamentalism, according to Armstrong, is a reaction of a social group which has felt its systems and values threatened by the pioneering and probing work of rationalist logos. The fundamentalist reassertion

of the terms of its *mythos* functions to resist the influence of new patterns of thought and behavior to which *logos* opens a society. But this is no mere feud, for the terms of the dialectic between the poles do not remain static across centuries. For example, by treating its scriptural texts as sources for valid claims about scientific truth, Christian fundamentalism of the last century has adopted the terms of the modernist *logos*, even as it intends to co-opt them to overwhelm its opponents with a Bible-derived version of natural and human sciences. This is a desperate move for religion, which ends up both abandoning its own depth in the *mythos* of its religion and implicitly conceding that rationalistic argument is stronger or more persuasive—more true!—than religious affirmations.

In 1963, Tillich commented on this process in the Earl Lectures.

[When] Christianity defends itself [by turning] the symbolic stories of Biblical literature into objectifying events, it does what it should fight against. . . . In centuries in which this objectification had not yet taken place . . . there was no real difference between [history, legend, and myth] But in the moment that the modern mind realized the difference [between these] . . . the Christian case was lost. The objectifying defenders of Christianity had surrendered their defensive power This is one of the many reasons for the irrelevance of the Christian message.¹¹

In order to carry the Christian message out of its enclaves and irrelevance in North America, the next church needs to articulate what transformation is, for both individuals and communities; that is, the church will be clear about the form that actually undergoes change in the course of transformation. When this is clear, the next church can engage participants in formation consistent with that understanding of transformation and thus re-present the ancient wisdom in the church's doctrine of salvation in terms meaningful to those who abandoned the Christian tradition when it appeared to admit no paths of growth beyond mythic-literalism.

This brings us back to a point of considerable sensitivity. On the one hand, the next church needs an adequate theory of the divisions that damaged all semblance of unity in the twentieth century. On the other hand, the application of that theory must not suggest that lower levels of consciousness are less worthy modes of Christian life. The division cannot merely be accepted! At the same time, the hope of personal, communal, and even historical transformation in Christ must not become a casualty of the need for sensitivity or political correctness. In the North American context, it is perhaps impossible to speak of persons at higher and lower stages without sacrificing the opportunity to be in conversation with persons across the spectrum under discussion. This may point to a fundamental unworkability in the theory presented here. Alternatively, it may simply reflect a condition of human development. If there is to be any movement forward from the present impasse in the American church, the theoretical approach taken must, at a minimum, do three things. First, it must make sense of the modes of believing in people who, by their own account, do not understand one another. Second, its vision for the church must not seek to exclude or remove any mode of believing from the church. Third, its critique of human nature must leave no one just as they are, for "all fall short of the glory of God." Therefore, the approach must apply the blade of transformation equally to all.

A developmental theory of faith and consciousness can meet these tests. Anticipating that the meaning of salvation will differ sharply at different developmental levels, this approach does not put more-literal interpretations of salvation in the wrong. To the contrary, it is gladly accepted that mythical-literal readings of the world often help people integrate confusing elements of personality at a critical moments of disintegration, thus justifiably earning their once-for-all character in the subject's memory. As we have seen, the developmental approach also anticipates the formation of church enclaves with ideologies strongly resistant to their own transformation. After the completion

of physical development of the brain in adolescence, there are no further developments in consciousness that come as a natural and predictable function of aging. Therefore, many adults remain at one stage throughout life and have, as a consequence, no direct experience of transformative stages. It is natural that church cultures coalesce around the experience of a single saving event in the past. It is not surprising if these same church cultures view more-dynamic interpretations of salvation as theological error. Using a developmental anthropology, the next church can accept this reality—and these people—without abandoning the gospel message about consciousness development. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 2.5) “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12.2) The next church can in principle commit itself to the *whole* people of God, both those who believe they are the only true church of true believers and those who abandoned the church as fixated at the mythic-literal level of consciousness and unwilling to be transformed.

Where desire for stage-wise spiritual development is to become the norm for understanding self, other, and God, the next church needs to define discrete levels of consciousness. These definitions function like a map, showing how one level is related to another. It is worthwhile to note, however, that maps are not “real.” They are representations of experiences of a territory made by travelers in the interests of helping others to venture upon the territory. Maps are subject to falsification and improvement by later travelers. The next church needs a map which can make sense of life in Christ for people at many levels of development, including the literal-minded and the rational-minded and those pressing beyond rationalism into what theorists of integral development such as Ken Wilber and James Marion call “vision-logic.”

In addition to a map, the next church needs more clarity about methods in the spiritual life. Let it be said up front that neither spiritual practices nor the experiences of growth individuals might have are ever new in an absolute sense. One meaning Christians can derive from their affirmation of Jesus Christ as both fully human and fully divine is that there is no new level of consciousness waiting for some explorer to discover, on the analogy of a new plant or planet. Jesus Christ makes present the wholeness of human consciousness; there is no “level above.” Hence, the newness of spiritual transformation, not surprisingly, is primarily the newness of self-discovery in the grace of God. The next church needs to teach and refine practices that are helpful to this end. Effective practices differ for persons at different levels of development. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to summarize the descriptive work of many researchers and philosophers on the subjects of maps and methods,¹² a clear definition of spiritual development is needed. What form is actually subject to *transformation*?

While describing “universalizing faith,” the highest level in his seven-stage typology of faith development, James Fowler writes that there are

... two tendencies we have seen developing in the earlier stages. The first involves *decentration from self* . . . a qualitative expansion in *perspective taking*, a “knowing” the world through the eyes and experiences of persons, classes, nationalities, and faiths quite different from one’s own . . . [The second is] . . . an expansion of those groups and interests whose valuing . . . gradually become matters of our concern as well.¹³

In other words, in moving to a new stage of development, the form that is transformed is the self itself—the whole person. The self de-centers from itself, and re-centers in a larger circle of values and meanings. This formulation reads as a clear, logical proposition. In experience, however, since the self cannot will its own destruction without actually rousing *itself* to that goal, thus strengthening

some aspects of the self it set out to destroy, “decentration from self” cannot be managed as a plan of attack against undesirable aspects of personality. The inescapable futility of the ego’s efforts to dominate or destroy itself helps account for the failure of conventional religious guilt to transform patterns of mind and behavior. The theological claim against the possibility of bringing about one’s own salvation is also rooted in this dynamic. The spiritual traditions have gathered the world’s richest deposits of experience and wisdom on this paradox, how the will can engage in its own transformation without deception or neurosis. Many traditions use the image of death to describe the process. The form that undergoes transformation is the self as it knows itself; the process is a death. As it is manifest in “universalizing” faith, Fowler describes it as “a powerful kind of *kenosis*, or emptying, of self . . . the result of having one’s affections powerfully drawn beyond the finite centers of value and power . . . that promise meaning and security.”

Harvard’s Robert Kegan looks at the phenomenon of decentration from self in another way, with different terms. At every higher level (or order) of consciousness in his five-order typology of development, aspects of the self as the *subject* of awareness become the *objects* of awareness at the next level. Again, the form subject to transformation is the self, but now “self” is understood more specifically as a structure of perception which is subject to a kind of death. In Piaget’s well-known early childhood studies, for example, the youthful subject of seven and older acquires concrete-operational skills and can perceive and predict cause-and-effect relations in objects which he formerly could not think *about* at all. Nevertheless, he cannot think abstractly about these objects as the adolescent can. The adolescent, in turn, is generally not able to value another’s point of view, even though he can see that the other *has* another point of view.¹⁴

What gradually happens is not just a linear accretion of more and more that one can look at or think about, but a qualitative shift in the very shape of the window or lens through which one looks at the world. A given subject-object relationship establishes the shape of the window. Thus, for a certain period of time, a particular distinction between what is object and what is subject persists . . . and you know the world through that system. In adolescence and early adulthood, a transformation occurs in which we essentially develop the complexity to internalize and identify with the values of our surround[ing environment]. Now, the transformation that is most common to the period from age twenty-five to fifty is a move out of this orientation of being shaped by one’s surround to become what we call *self-authoring*. This is fourth-order consciousness [in which] we are able to have an internal authority by which we ourselves are able to name what is valuable . . . and we make decisions about which claims and expectations we will and will not follow. This transformation is enormously powerful and has a captivating perfume. It is in fact a highly prevalent and dramatic transformation between the ages of twenty-five and fifty. But it is not the transformation that people who think about higher stages of consciousness are interested in . . . The ultimate end state of this story . . . would be a state in which the subject-object distinction comes to an end . . . through the complete emptying of the subject into the object so that there is, in a sense, no subject at all . . . and the self has become entirely identified with the world.¹⁵

These two descriptions of consciousness development map transformation along boundaries of the self which are subject to disintegration and reintegration. The experience of disintegration is inherently threatening. Resistance is natural. But when a person is able to integrate new ways of apprehending the world, new boundaries form around a qualitatively different self able to comprehend and connect with aspects of reality which the former self had not even perceived. It is new life, a rescuing from death. Fowler writes: “When one experiences the effective breakthrough of Spirit that brings release and new openness to synergy with Grace, we are in the presence of what Christian theologians have traditionally called salvation.”¹⁶ Not surprisingly, Kegan’s non-religious map of this territory also has profound resonance with Jesus’ call: to follow him in the way of the cross; to lose one’s life that she may save it; to forgive others and love enemies without concern for self-

protection; and to the whole Body of Christ that it might give its life for the world.

The crisis of the church and of Western society, viewed from the point of view of the development of humanity's highest capacities, is that it is locked in an argument (the one Tillich called autonomous reason's "never-ending fight with heteronomy") that avoids, and may subconsciously be designed to prevent, the possibility of transformation both personal and collective. Very large cohorts of the population concentrate their attention in defense of their own ideological correctness by attacking the errors they perceive in their opponents. Salvation is emptied of other than purely personal meanings. From a biblical perspective, such a personalized conception of salvation vitiates its power, if not God's purpose. The world-historical nature of the crisis is attested by its duration through at least several generations, preserving, alas, the relevance of mid-twentieth century critics such as Tillich and, here, Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

The old words of churches are incapable of being saving words anymore. The old words fail and fall silent, and our Christian life consists only of prayer and trying to do the right thing. It is not for us to foretell the day, but the day will come when some are called to utter the word of God in such a way that the world is changed and renewed. There will be a new language, perhaps quite unreligious, but liberating and saving, like the language of Jesus, so that people are horrified by it, and yet conquered by its power, the language of a new truth, the language that foretells the peace of God and the coming of the Kingdom.¹⁷

Although many Christians and many congregations stand apart from or above this conflict, the church as a whole cannot hope to survive separation from brothers and sisters in such immense numbers. Its identity requires it to enact itself as a parable of the created universe at one. Living out that parable, that church need not (must not!) strive to bring all things visibly under one rule, but neither can it stand complacent as a huge cohort moves from one level of consciousness to another, abandoning communities of faith that value only the mythic-literal level of consciousness. The next church will pursue the scientific-rationalists. It will do this not to "bring them back into the fold" as some church growth gurus still propose. It will do this when, in the presence of the Spirit, it recognizes that scientific *logos* is part of the world-historical dialectic of developing consciousness and for that very reason, objective, scientific inquiry must be re-integrated in a Christian account of divine revelation so that the Christian religion might be transformed through the spiritual power present in self-authoring rationalism. "The relevance of Christianity is asserted by its self-negation. Without this continuous self-negation, Christianity is not true Christianity and it is not relevant."¹⁸ (Tillich)

The next church also already understands that, as Tillich wrote, "the catastrophe of autonomous reason is complete. Neither autonomy nor heteronomy, isolated and in conflict, can give the answer." The next church will therefore also pursue the rational-scientific cohort from another direction, appealing with its own vibrant, compelling, irresistible claim that it has known something—*met someone*, is the language we use—more than the sciences can account for. The next church wants its methods and its language to be subjects of rigor, involving trial, discovery, review, potential falsification, and improvement in the search for what is true. In a word, the next church is committed to the data of experience as firmly as is the best of modern science. Its conversation is about inner experience, to be sure, but who has had any other kind? The transformative level which awaits, and therefore threatens, scientific rationalism brings a wholly new perspective on the meaning of personhood itself.

The way forward in consciousness development has often been brilliantly lit by scientists who recognize that good science and faithful religion share in a spirit of courage with regard to truth, for both are unwilling to stop asking questions about reality even when the process grows difficult or threatening.* Albert Einstein contributed liberally to this fund of mutual understanding between the ultimate purposes of scientific and religious quests. Here is one deposit:

Science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration toward truth and understanding. This source of feeling, however, springs from the sphere of religion. To this there also belongs faith in the possibility that the regulations valid for the world of existence are rational, that is, comprehensible to reason. I cannot conceive of a genuine scientist [who had not] that profound faith. The situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.¹⁹

In *Mind and Emergence: From Quantum to Consciousness*, philosopher and theologian Philip Clayton lays out a middle course for a meeting of minds committed to the empirical claims of the physical sciences and the study of the development of consciousness. He opens his analysis with another reference to an impasse related to that between autonomous and heteronomous reason:

It is widely but falsely held that there are only two major ways to interpret the world: in a physicalist or in a dualist fashion. The mistaken belief in this dichotomy has its roots in the confrontation of Newtonian physics with the metaphysical systems that still dominated in the seventeenth century, which were built up out of Greek, Christian and medieval elements . . . The present argument against the physicalist–dualist dichotomy is derived from a third source: the revolution brought about by the sciences of evolution. The evolutionary perspective has fatally undercut both sides of the once regnant either/or: physicalism, with its tendency to stress the sufficiency of physics, and dualism, with its tendency to pull mind out of the evolutionary account altogether. In the following pages I argue that *emergence* is the philosophical position . . . that best expresses the philosophical import of evolutionary theory.²⁰

The study and philosophy called *emergence* first received major thematic treatment from Conway Lloyd Morgan in the 1920s. Clayton reviews his work and that of a number of thinkers since that time who undertake to account for the discrete levels of complexity in nature, which Darwin’s theories do not. Darwinian thought assumes a gradualism consisting of myriads of tiny incremental changes in the offspring of particular organisms. Morgan saw it quite differently, as Clayton reports.

“Emergence is all about the recognition that evolution is ‘punctuated’: even a full reconstruction of evolution would not remove the basic stages or levels that are revealed in the evolutionary process . . . Morgan argued powerfully for the notion of levels of reality. He continually advocated a study of the natural world that would look for novel properties at the level of a system taken as a whole, properties that are not present in the parts of the system.”²¹

Clayton’s work is imbued with awareness that reductionist philosophers and many scientists will bolt from the argument if a metaphysical solution (God, for example) is imported to solve a knotty problem for which nature may yet disclose a simpler answer. Summarizing the key defining characteristics of emergence theory from Morgan’s work, Clayton observes:

Emergence is interesting to scientifically minded thinkers only to the extent that it accepts the principle of parsimony, introducing no more metaphysical superstructure than is required by the data themselves. The data, Morgan argued, . . . support the conclusions that there are major discontinuities in evolution; that these discontinuities result in the multiple levels . . . manifested in the natural world; that objects at these levels evidence a unity and integrity, which require us to treat them as a wholes . . . or agents in their own right; and that, as such, they exercise their own causal powers on other agents (horizontal causality) and on the parts of which they are composed (downward causation).²²

The property of “downward causation” is the heart of emergence theory. By itself, downward

* Bad science and bad religion, by contrast, both stop asking questions when feared answers threaten their ideologies.

causation cannot seem a remarkable concept to traditional theists. Creation as told in Genesis is a downwardly causal process. Every person who believes that God can directly bring about changes in natural objects assumes divine downward causation. However, the dualism in traditional theism is repellent to the rational mind, for it introduces “a causal role for other sorts of things, such as souls or spirits, whose essence could never be derived from the basal physical properties.”²³ “By contrast, downward causation for emergentists might involve . . . the transformation of energy into forms (say mental energy) not well understood by contemporary science. But it would not involve any strange new addition of energy into the natural world.”²⁴ In other words, although emergence theorists, and Clayton in particular, have no agenda to disprove the reality of God, they do intend to respect the laws of nature consistently revealed by the rigor of scientific method. This keeps “scientifically minded thinkers” in the discussion. It is the contention of this paper that without the involvement of the rational-scientific consciousness in the religious conversation about what is real, the ground of theological reason is itself “fatally undercut”; and that in that situation, the church in the West cannot carry its message beyond the ghetto of isolated heteronomous reason, which is widely supposed by outsiders to be continuous with the Christian church. The church needs an integral theory of creation in order to pursue its higher vision of the chief good and happiness of humans.

Clayton’s argument progresses beyond definitions and abstractions to report extensively on examples of emergence from the laboratories of the sciences of artificial systems, biochemistry, microbiology, and evolutionary biology. One researcher numbers the natural world’s discrete emergent levels at twenty-eight! The highest level is human consciousness. Clayton writes:

Eventually, a level evolved at which entities . . . became capable of acting according to explicit conscious purposes, . . . as persons who could be affected by and affect other conscious beings, in a manner fully consistent with, though also going beyond, the laws of physics. This evolutionary achievement rests on the shoulders of innumerable gradual developments . . . Thus ‘mind’ as we know it in human experience has important precursors in animals’ perception of their environment and especially in the signs of a rudimentary awareness of the other-as-other in some higher primates . . . What natural history . . . teaches us, then, is that philosophers from Plato to Descartes and many of the religious traditions were wrong: there is *no absolute dividing line between mind and matter* . . . Dualism, it now appears, is a flatlands philosophy, one that disregards the depth of understanding provided by natural history. Yet it turns out, the physicalists are equally mistaken . . . Their error is the mirror image of the dualists’ blindness to natural history. If the one group over-emphasizes the distinctiveness of human cognition, the other fails to recognize it in the first place as a distinct explanatory category . . . To conclude that both reductive physicalism and dualism are mistaken is to maintain that mind emerges through an evolutionary process.²⁵ (*Italics added.*)

This inquiry models how, by integrating physics and metaphysics, the next church can let God reveal Godself. The image of God shifts as durable elements of biblical myths are refined from the backs of modern minds by the fire of reason, and the nature of the self shifts in response. On the one hand, it was easy for many religionists to concede that God did not literally blow spirit into matter at some date. Now, however, we are asked to consider mind itself emerging in natural sequences without miraculous, law-breaking divine interventions to seal the fate of the development. Does God not relate Godself to nature at the lowest emergent levels of atoms and cells and organs? Might it be more meaningful to say that God does not exist *at that level*?

On the other hand, emergence demonstrates that consciousness is not reducible to the micro-physical interactions on which it depends. As an emergent level in nature, consciousness is a wholly new reality in itself. Since the existence of and properties of prior levels do not imply or predict the novel properties that demonstrably emerge from them, and since the next emergent level is able to have influence on some of the parts of which it is physically made, emergence theory points to an irresistible freedom present in the cosmos from the beginning. At some point in the emergence of

emergence itself, the higher level has acquired the capacity to *intend* to influence the parts of which it is made. This emergent level is able to take a role in authoring itself—in its own re-creation—as its development becomes the object of its own will to develop.

This description of the implications of emergence is consistent with the approach to levels of faith and consciousness development discussed in this paper. That consciousness, itself an emergent level of nature, should in turn manifest discrete emergent levels which become manifest over long spans of history is a hypothesis roughly adequate to the actual marvel of human development taking place, as it has, in the last few seconds of the cosmos' billions of years of unfoldment. On this hypothesis, there would come increasingly into consciousness an awareness of its own power to influence its own development. At the same time, such consciousness would recognize that it creates nothing, indeed that everything in its nature is a gift. Just as consciousness can see how it is wondrously served by nature, so it can see that the perfect expression of its continuing ascent is its power to relinquish its power and its grasp, that there may be more unity and more insight into the unity of its own ground. In a word, consciousness emerges into awareness of God who establishes it, and sees itself differently in relation to God as emergence unfolds. That some so-minded should have been awakened to this possibility in their encounter with the portrait of Jesus as the risen Christ, crucified, dead, and buried, gives a clear enough account of the passionate hope of salvation in which the early church began, as well as of the hope by which people still come from every direction to the side of Christ, joyful to receive through the tradition of the church a language (which they could not invent) that makes possible a conversation about what this consciousness is *for*.

The concluding sentences of Clayton's book set the tone for this paper's conclusion regarding the place of the church in salvation:

[If] one grants that animals manifest distinct forms of awareness not found elsewhere in the natural world, and that humans evidence mental qualities unparalleled in other animals, [and one] concludes that something like the theory of emergence provides the best account of these mental properties and their causal role in the world[, it] seems hard to deny that these two conclusions lead inevitably to confrontation with some of the big questions of philosophy—questions about agency and freedom, about higher-order levels of mind, and about transcendent or divine mind. Debates about such topics are necessarily speculative . . . Nevertheless discussions of dualism, reductionism, and emergence are so clearly connected to certain of the enduring philosophical questions that only a loss of nerve would keep one from following the line of argument as far as it leads.

But something bigger is at issue . . . : the relationship between scientific and nonscientific factors, as humans seek to understand their place in the universe. The exponential growth of scientific knowledge, perhaps more than any other single factor, has transformed our sense of who we are and what kind of world we inhabit. . . The continuing explosion of scientific knowledge in the 21st-century would tempt many to conclude that beyond the reach of natural science, there is no knowledge, only opinion and affect. The emergence argument that I have traced in these pages is one way to show why the equation of knowledge and natural science is mistaken, [for] rational debate of the 'really big questions'—debates not dominated by appeals to tradition, force, or absolute authority—become[s] increasingly important as the human mind continues to expand the limits of its knowledge, and the knowledge of its limits, in an age of science.²⁶

Salvation ultimately emerges in consciousness as a name for a happiness not worth aiming for were it only for oneself or one's group. In passionate anticipation of the unity of all things, this consciousness stumbles forth on the stage of history seeking to embody this hope of the union and reunion of all things. Among other great endeavors, this consciousness, having encountered its ground in the person of Jesus Christ, builds the church, but the church crumbles in arrogance and ignorance, in one era and then another. Emerging with power to choose the upper path of its own development, this Christ consciousness confronts a possibility that unconsciousness cannot see. It is this: the incontrovertible proof of the emergence of a superior level of consciousness manifests

itself as power to *not* pursue accumulation of material power and dominance, but to choose to step down and surrender and serve—thus to be raised up higher, aware that lower levels of consciousness cannot perceive the newly emergent level for what it is. The fact that many of us have seen this power of consciousness at work in Christ Jesus, and that by grace and in glad obedience to the transcendent emergence of mind, we desire to follow the sign of the cross, and descend, and serve, that all may be one—these are elements in the deep reason which will lead the next church to learn eagerly from the wisdom of the sciences, and humbly cease from some church doctrines and practices, so that the church may begin to speak “a new language, perhaps quite un-religious, but liberating and saving, like the language of Jesus . . . a language of a new truth, the language that foretells the peace of God and the coming of the Kingdom.”

Endnotes

1. "Salvation is a Kind of Seeing," unpublished CTI paper, 2005, by Stephen H. Phelps
2. In one of Karen Blixen's short stories, a character states that there are three forms of true happiness: the cessation of pain, the experience of an excess of strength, and certainty that one is doing the will of God.
3. It goes without saying that the ego rebels fiercely at the apparent judgment that one is at a stage of development. Whoever thinks he has completed development (having been saved, for example, or having outgrown childish religion) can only look down on people who have not completed his own steps in growth. The fact that a person objects to a typology of stage-wise development is, however, not in itself any evidence against the validity or explanatory power of the claim.
4. Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1973)
5. Lindbeck, George. *The Nature of Doctrine*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) p. 22
6. See James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981) and, more recently, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000) pp. 43-60.
7. *ibid.*, p. 49
8. Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1* (Chicago: Harper and Row, 1967) p. 84
9. *ibid.*, pp. 85-86
10. Armstrong, Karen. *The Battle for God*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000)
11. Paul Tillich, *The Irrelevance and Relevance of the Christian Message*. (Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1996) p. 36
12. Works by Fowler, cited above, find complements in the works of, inter alia, Lawrence Kohlberg, Howard Gardner, Ken Wilber, Clare Graves, Robert Kegan, Don Beck, and Fr. Thomas Keating.
13. Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, p. 55
14. See Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994)
15. "A Conversation with Robert Kegan," in *What is Enlightenment*, Fall/Winter 2002, p. 147
16. Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, p. 60
17. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Simon & Schuster/Touchstone, 1997), p. 300
18. Tillich, *The Irrelevance and Relevance of the Christian Message*, p. 52
19. From a 1939 address to the Princeton Theological Seminary, quoted in *Reflections*, Vol. 1, Spring 1998. "Einstein and God," by Thomas Torrance, p.8
20. Clayton, Philip. *Mind and Emergence: From Quantum to Consciousness*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 1-2
21. *ibid.*, p. 14
22. *ibid.*, p. 15
23. *ibid.*, p. 39
24. *ibid.*, p. 51
25. *ibid.*, p. 98-101
26. *ibid.*, p. 204-206