

PAUL TILLICH AND PITIRIM A. SOROKIN ON LOVE

by Mary Montgomery Clifford

Abstract. An analysis of Paul Tillich's three-volume *Systematic Theology* and Pitirim A. Sorokin's *The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors, and Techniques of Moral Transformation* reveals how a metaphysical dialogue on God and love contributes to scientific and theological scholarship on altruism. This article focuses on similarities and differences in Tillich and Sorokin. Similarities include a belief in the importance of the ontological/love connection and the conclusion that a special state, ecstasy, is integral to the experience of genuine love. Differences serve to complement rather than negate. For example, Tillich's recognition that ecstatic connections with the divine within finitude are fragmentary balances Sorokin's view that these ecstatic peaks are reached only by the few. The similarities give resonance and point to the overall creation, while the differences often serve as counterpoint to balance the ideas of the scientist and the theologian.

Keywords: altruism; dynamic power of life; ecstatic connections; "energy" of love; five dimensions of love; fragmentary connections; integral knowledge; love; metaphysical dialogue; ontological/love connection; supraconscious; systematic method; unlimited love.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF A DIALOGUE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION

An examination of the work of theologian Paul Tillich and the pioneering sociologist Pitirim A. Sorokin generates a dialogue between the two that is both fruitful and challenging in a consideration of science, religion, and the metaphysics of love. The Tillich-Sorokin dialogue presented in this essay not only addresses the scientific and religious basis of unlimited love as a core aspect of the divine but steps beyond this basic recognition into

Mary Montgomery Clifford is a doctoral student at Chicago Theological Seminary, 5757 S. University Ave., Chicago, IL 60637.

[*Zygon*, vol. 39, no. 1 (March 2004).]

© 2004 by the Joint Publication Board of *Zygon*. ISSN 0591-2385

the realm of practical ideas and methodologies that may enhance the development of altruism.

The dialogue is based on an analysis of Tillich's three-volume *Systematic Theology* (1951; 1957; 1963) and Sorokin's *The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors, and Techniques of Moral Transformation* ([1954] 2002), which has been the focus of renewed scholarly attention since its reissue. Comparing Tillich and Sorokin reveals numerous parallels, many of which are profound. These parallels include both similarities and differences. When correlated, they act as point and counterpoint to one another. Like a cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach, the Tillich-Sorokin parallels play off each other in a grand design that is strengthened by their interaction. The similarities give resonance and point to the overall creation, while the differences often serve as counterpoint to balance the ideas of scientist and theologian. The result is an analysis that reveals how a metaphysical dialogue on God and love can contribute to scientific and theological scholarship on altruism.

LIFE PARALLELS AS A BASIS FOR DIALOGUE

The parallels between the lives of Tillich and Sorokin are striking. I believe that they contribute to the depth and breadth of the Tillich-Sorokin dialogue. Both lived for seventy-nine years within the same approximate time period (Tillich 1886–1965, Sorokin 1889–1968). Both experienced a depth of religious training during childhood, Tillich as the son of a Lutheran pastor and Sorokin as a ward of an illiterate but mystical uncle and as the young painter of icons and gilding in village Russian Orthodox churches. The thought processes of both were formed to a great extent by traumatic war- and conflict-related experiences in their native lands. In Germany, Tillich was influenced both by his experiences as a field chaplain in World War I, where he grappled with carnage and death, and his interaction and opposition to the rise of National Socialism. In Russia, Sorokin was imprisoned by first the Czarists and then the Bolsheviks. Although he was a socialist (secretary under President Kerensky), Sorokin's opposition to the Bolsheviks led to imprisonment and repeated threats of execution (Thomas 2000; Post 2002).

Both Tillich and Sorokin escaped the oppression in their native lands by emigrating to the United States, where both stood out as leaders in their respective fields—Tillich as a theologian and Sorokin as the founding chairman of the Department of Sociology at Harvard University. Both taught at Harvard (Sorokin 1931–1959, Tillich 1955–1962).

Both published numerous books and papers (Gomes 2000; Thomas 2000; Post 2002). Tillich remained a driving force in theological thought throughout most of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

Sorokin's influence has been less consistent, largely because of vigorous opposition from Talcott Parsons and his followers during his lifetime (Johnston 1995). Sorokin has, however, experienced two significant revivals, the first in the 1960s when young dissident sociologists attended the 1969 American Sociological Association meeting wearing "Sorokin lives" buttons (Johnston 1989) and today with the reissue by Templeton Press of *The Works of Love* and with the attention of Stephen Post and the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love.¹

METHODOLOGIES AND THOUGHT PROCESSES

A comparison of the methodologies and thought processes of Tillich and Sorokin provides further insight into the ramifications of their dialogue. Comparisons can be made in three areas: systematic method, challenges to authority, and intellectual development. The systematic method is evident in the works of both Tillich and Sorokin. Tillich clearly defines himself as a systematic theologian; in fact, for him, divine love gives the systematic foundation (1951). While Sorokin does not stress the systematic underpinning of his scholarship, others, such as Robert G. Hazo (1976), have called his work on altruism one of the most extensive treatments to be found in the systematic literature about love.

Both Tillich and Sorokin issued challenges to established authority throughout their lives. In Germany, Tillich's opposition to the continued church-state alliance and his socialist leanings brought him into conflict with church authorities (Thomas 2000). Throughout the three volumes of his *Systematic Theology* he offers up critical challenges to established institutions and scholarship including religion, psychology, philosophy, and political structures. Sorokin challenged the narrow and technocratic aspects of sociology, which he considered to be captive to small fragments of data while lacking in any larger systematic, cultural-historical framework (Post 2002).

The thought processes of both Tillich and Sorokin were deeply grounded in the writings of intellectuals from their respective native lands. Tillich was deeply influenced by the works of F. W. J. von Schelling, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Rudolf Bultmann, Nikolaus Otto, and Martin Heidegger (Thomas 2000). Sorokin's grounding was in the works of Nikolai Fedorov, Sergei Bulgakov, Feodor Dostoyevsky, Prince Peter Kropotkin, and Vladimir Solovyev, who wrote in the tradition of *integral knowledge*, a methodology that brought together religion, psychology, ontology, cosmology, ethics, metaphysics, sociology, and biology (Post 2002). In both men, their intellectual grounding led to a broad yet systematic perspective that included the larger cultural-historical framework.

POINT: PARALLELS OF SIMILARITY ON LOVE

Such a framework is integral to, and forms the foundation of, the work of Tillich and Sorokin. It is integral to the point and counterpoint of their dialogue on love. The points or parallels of similarity in Tillich and Sorokin include an emphasis on the ontological nature of love, the conviction that there is a connection between love and a higher source, and the belief that a special state is integral to the experience of genuine love. Tillich stresses that love is an ontological concept and cautions against sentimental misinterpretations of love that emphasize the emotional element. Love's "emotional element," states Tillich, "is a consequence of its ontological nature" (1951, 279). Like Tillich, Sorokin stresses the ontological power or "energy" of love. In addition to noting the analysis of Solovyev and other thinkers, he underscores the importance of the ontological/love connection by quoting from Tillich's *The Protestant Era*: "Love is basically not an emotional but an ontological power, it is the essence of life itself, namely the dynamic reunion of that which is separated" ([1954] 2002, 7). He also quotes Tillich as stating that love "is life itself in its actual unity" (p. 3). It is significant that Sorokin quotes Tillich twice in the first chapter of *The Ways and Power of Love*. It is evident that the scientist Sorokin values and uses a Tillichian theological lens in his research.

Another parallel of similarity in the work of Tillich and Sorokin is the connection both make between love and a higher source. It is not surprising that Tillich, a theologian, identifies this higher source as God or that he explores God as the Ground of Being in relation to love. For Tillich, the relationship between God as the Ground of Being and love is primary. It is not a matter of proximity of one to the other. He stresses that God is love, and, "since God is being-itself, one must say that being-itself is love" (1951, 279). Tillich further equates love as the dynamic power that forms the connection with God and being-itself. He states that man's "complete centeredness enables him to participate in his world without limits; and love, as the dynamic power of life, drives him toward such participation" (1957, 71).

At first glance, it may seem unusual that the scientist Sorokin also makes the equation between love and a higher source. When Sorokin's integral-knowledge methodology is taken into consideration, however, this exploration becomes a natural extension of his thought process. Sorokin considers the relationship between love and God through a study of those whom he considers to be apostles of love. In order to understand the highest ramifications of love, he pays special attention to such figures as Jesus, Al-Hallaj, Damien the Leper, and Gandhi, noting that, despite being persecuted and hated and therefore without any apparent social source of love energy, these figures were nevertheless able to maintain a love at high levels. These high levels were maintained in all five dimensions of love as developed and codi-

fied in Sorokin's research: intensity, extensity, duration, purity, and adequacy. This love, notes Sorokin, seems to transcend ordinary human limits. Based on this observation, Sorokin develops a hypothesis in which such perfect love can be best explained by an inflow of love from a higher source. This higher source can be called God, the Godhead, the soul of the universe, the Heavenly Father, Truth, or, in Sorokin's study, "supraconscious" ([1954] 2002, 26).

A third parallel of similarity is that scientist and theologian independently come to the conclusion that a special state is integral to the experience of genuine love. For Tillich that state is ecstasy, the essential component of revelation. Tillich believes that the law of love and final revelation are entwined and as such can be viewed together as a gift from Jesus the Christ, the New Being. Tillich states that in order to participate in this gift at any point in history, humans must experience the ecstatic connection with God and that revelation occurs when someone "is grasped by the manifestation of the mystery" (1951, 11). This is the state of ecstasy, defined by Tillich as a state of mind that is extraordinary in the sense that the mind transcends its ordinary situation.

The term *ecstasy* is used rather narrowly by Sorokin. However, there are parallels between Sorokin's discussion of techniques and states that enhance altruization and the state of ecstasy that Tillich equates with the direct connection with God. For example, Sorokin points out that scientific findings on the positive effects of altruism have not succeeded in altruizing overall human behavior and concludes that something else must be needed. He speculates that the "something else" may be "moments of immersion into supraconscious meditation and creativity" ([1954] 2002, 351). His examination of "The Unified Techniques of Patanjali's and Other Yogas" in Chapter 19 of *The Ways and Power of Love* proceeds from that speculation.

The parallels between Sorokin and Tillich on the role of emotion in ecstasy are also similar. While Sorokin and Tillich would agree that love is basically not an emotional but an ontological power, both also highlight a definitive role for emotion. Sorokin points out that logical reason is not enough; otherwise, rational persuasion and scientific demonstration of the advantages of kindness and cooperation would have more success. He refers to emotional and affective excitation that "breaks the barriers of the unconscious otherwise hardly penetrable for the purely intellectual ideas" (2002, 312). Tillich also recognizes the importance of emotion when he states that "emotion within the cognitive realm does not deform a given structure; it opens it up" (1951, 154). He notes that "the ultimate concern about the final revelation is as radically rational as it is radically emotional, and neither side can be eliminated without destructive consequence" (1951, 154).

COUNTERPOINT: PARALLELS OF DIFFERENCE ON LOVE

The parallels of similarity in Tillich and Sorokin demonstrate the viability of the idea that there can be clear and precise bridges between theological and scientific thought. Disciplinary differences are maintained, yet similar conclusions are reached. What, then, are the contributions of the counterpoints, or parallels of difference, that occur in Tillich and Sorokin? I suggest that these differences serve to complement rather than negate. In several areas the thought of Sorokin can be viewed as a corrective on Tillich and vice versa. Three of these areas are access to the highest form of love, the value of ritual, and the lessons of saints.

In the area of access to the highest form of love, or unlimited love, both Tillich and Sorokin recognize the ability of human beings to achieve supreme love or connect with the law of love through direct participation in the Ground of Being, or the supraconscious. They differ, however, in their view of how accessible this participation and connection can be. For Sorokin, such access is rare. "It goes without saying that these peaks of supraconscious meditation and spirituality are reached only by the very few 'anointed' and 'chosen,'" he states. "For the overwhelming majority they are inaccessible. For the rank and file only much lower forms of moral meditation and creativity are available—the forms dictated mainly by their conscious mind and urged by their vital needs" ([1954] 2002, 351).

Tillich recognizes that through ecstasy, access to the highest form of love is accessible to all. While he acknowledges the rarity of the highest and most intense forms of these ecstatic connections (1951; 1963), he maintains that fragmentary connections are real, important, and accessible to all. These connections are fragmentary because existence within finitude is fragmentary. They are part of the absoluteness of love, and, says Tillich, "the absoluteness of love is its power to go into the concrete situation, to discover what is demanded by the predicament of the concrete to which it turns" (1951, 152).

Tillich's theology provides a valuable counterpoint to Sorokin in this area. Although Sorokin is searching for a way to transform society as a whole into one that is more altruistic, he ends up concentrating on techniques that primarily employ the unconscious and conscious forces of humans. He recognizes that these forces alone cannot successfully eliminate interhuman strife and extend solidarity over the whole of humanity without the guidance, control, and creative support of the supraconscious, but he does not recognize that these connections to supraconscious are actually quite common, although fragmentary. Tillich recognizes the fragmentary connections as real and important. His stress on fragmentation allows humans to recognize each fragmentary connection to God or supraconscious as valid and valuable. In my own neo-Tillichian view, the recognition of the validity and value of each fragmentary connection leads to increasing

numbers of those moments and therefore to increasing moments in which unlimited love can be actualized. This hypothesis deserves scientific consideration.

A second area of counterpoint is the valuation of rituals. Here, Sorokin provides a corrective to Tillich's tendency to view rituals as superstition (1963). Unlike Tillich, Sorokin is openly and enthusiastically supportive of rituals and techniques that increase connections to God or supraconscious. His in-depth study of Yoga practices, meditation, and mystics led him to point out that "religious cults and rituals furnish us with a rich treasury of ingenious techniques serving this purpose" ([1954] 2002, 313). Sorokin's recognition of the value of ritual practice in engendering increased connectivity with God or supraconscious and therefore to the source of the highest form of love helps fill in a gap of understanding that is created by Tillich's distrust.

A third area of counterpoint centers around the contributions of the saints. Because of his grounding in the mystic side of Russian Orthodoxy, Sorokin places great value on the lessons that can be learned from the lives of saints. He points out, for example, a review of Christian Catholic and Russian Orthodox saints by the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism that indicated that 70 percent came from harmonious families who encouraged the activities that eventually led to their sainthood.

Tillich's Lutheran and Protestant grounding, in contrast, led him to basically reject the notion of saints as special emissaries of love. Instead, Tillich subscribed to the idea that the spiritual community is the community of spiritual personalities, that is, of personalities who are grasped by the spiritual Presence and who are unambiguously, though fragmentarily, determined by it. Saints should not be given higher status or recognition, because this could lead to the idolatry of cult worship (1963).² In this case, Tillich's and Sorokin's ideas balance one another. While Sorokin highlights the valuable lessons that can be obtained by studying the lives and techniques used by humans who humbly strive toward supreme altruism, Tillich provides a cautionary note by highlighting the demonic danger of saints who may fall prey to hubris and by emphasizing the accessibility of sainthood to all members of the spiritual community.

A continuing dialogue between Tillich and Sorokin promises to contribute richly to the emerging scientific and theological scholarship on altruism. Such dialogue also can provide a template for other dialogues between scientists and theologians.

NOTES

A version of this article was presented at the Works of Love Conference: Scientific and Religious Perspectives on Altruism, 31 May–5 June 2003, Villanova University, Pennsylvania, and to the Paul Tillich Group at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, 22–25 November 2003, Atlanta, Georgia.

1. The Institute for Research on Unlimited Love (IRUL) is a research and educational institute focused on the study of unlimited love for all humanity without exception. The mission of IRUL is to significantly increase the knowledge of unlimited love through scientific research, education and publication. IRUL, under the direction of Dr. Stephen G. Post, is located at the School of Medicine, Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. The Institute offers the following definition of unlimited love: "The essence of love is to affectively affirm as well as to unselfishly delight in the well-being of others, and to engage in acts of care and service on their behalf; unlimited love extends this love to all others without exception, in an enduring and constant way. Widely considered the highest form of virtue, unlimited love is often deemed a Creative Presence underlying and integral to all of reality: participation in unlimited love constitutes the fullest experience of spirituality."

2. Sorokin's categories of apostles of love and saints can be viewed as basically equivalent. For Sorokin, Jesus is a human, one among others who are great altruists or apostles of love and therefore models for the altruization of society. For Tillich (1951; 1963), Jesus is the Christ, the Final Revelation, not a saint but the New Being. Tillich introduces the absolute law of love within the context of the centrality of Jesus the Christ, stating that "the love of Jesus as the Christ, which is the manifestation of the divine love—and only this—embraces everything concrete in self and world" (1951, 152). Tillich includes those who belong to other religions or secular outlooks and those who were born before Christ through the concept of latent spiritual communities. For Tillich, Jesus the Christ is the Final Revelation and the central pivot point in history from which all spiritual communities, both latent and manifest (Christian), take their nourishment and make connections, though fragmentary, to the law of love and, therefore, to the Ground of Being.

REFERENCES

- Gomes, Peter J. 2000. "Introduction." In Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, xi–xxxiii. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.
- Hazo, Robert G. 1976. *The Idea of Love*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger.
- Johnston, Barry V. 1995. *Pitirim A. Sorokin: An Intellectual Biography*. Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas.
- . 1989. "Sorokin Lives! Centennial Observations." In *Footnotes*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 1, 5. Retrieved 21 May 2003 from <http://www.asanet.org/governance/sorokin.html>.
- Post, Stephen G. 2002. "Pitirim A. Sorokin as Pioneer in the Scientific Study of Unlimited Love." In Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors, and Techniques of Moral Transformation*, xv–xxviii. Philadelphia: Templeton.
- Sorokin, Pitirim A. [1954] 2002. *The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors, and Techniques of Moral Transformation*. Philadelphia: Templeton.
- Thomas, John Heywood. 2000. *Tillich*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Tillich, Paul. 1951. *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- . 1957. *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- . 1963. *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- . 1948. *The Protestant Era*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.