Tillich in Action: an artist’s perspective

The writer of this Abstract is a professional singer whose preparation and performance of German Lieder entail practical engagement with early and late romantic poetry. Robert Schumann’s setting of Heine’s Dichterliebe distills the despair of the later romantic poet who remains bound in the language of his nature infused predecessors, but lives in a technically progressive and self confident society. The dynamic tension and dangers inherent in our capacities for pragmatic, technical, intellectual and material manipulation were first popularly interpolated from German culture for the British public in the 19th century by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He was quickly accused of plagiarising Schelling’s developments of Kantian thought and, in response, suggested he was simultaneously co-creating, plagiarising and uniquely and imaginatively synthesising thought of Schelling (and Schlegel on Shakespeare) for the English. Although Coleridge did not find a ready audience for his popularizing the concepts of reason and understanding, unfinished dreams of a large epic The New Jerusalem, or an undelivered metaphysical summae, his brilliant fragmentary and chaotic career was a foundation for pioneers of theology, literature and social action. Following Coleridge, F D Maurice bore witness to an active theology that underpinned rival church parties, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was not an exclusive domain of church culture but established every aspect of public and private life as subject to the Lordship of God. Tillich’s writing brings an opportunity for a modern British readership to engage with both a popular and world class intellectual exposition of dialectic, ontological European philosophy and the German theological traditions so alien to a confirmed English pragmatism. In this broad context Tillich’s thought, much written in English but also in translation, is the great modern English language exposition of an impulse began by Coleridge and his followers. Tillich’s writing on transcending the myth of origin in action for justice, the inherent dangers within religious communities of failing to symbolically point towards the unconditioned, his championing of biblical criticism and his embracing of and witness within existential despair and meaninglessness, put his work in the canon of the British broad church. In the summer of 2015 singer Richard Parry claims he will tour Wales, following young Coleridge’s 1794 expedition, meeting with Welsh poets, artists, academics and the public to explore how Welsh culture already held and still holds knowledge and practice of the difference between rheswm a deall (reason and understanding), publicising and translating opportunities for technically or process focused organisations and institutions to find dialogues and arenas of public engagement which have capacity to affirm our "full" or "true" humanity. The values underpinning the tour are influenced in a major way by Tillich’s collaborator, the psychologist Carl Rogers and the tour intends to conclude with the founding of the British Society for the Public Understanding of Paul Tillich.

Richard M Parry (Cardiff, Wales) wrote and presented Royal Mail's keynote presentation to the World Congress for Total Quality Management, 1996.