

Union Theological Seminary

RELIGIOUS SOCIALISM:  
PAUL TILLICH, THE KAIROS, AND THE PRESENT MOMENT

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# **Religious Socialism:**

## **Paul Tillich, the Kairos, and the Present Moment**

### **General Introduction**

Paul Tillich is widely known for his confident and daring move to postulate the influence of theology not only on religion but also on culture. However, as I am going to show in the first part of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge that he has extended the influence of theology just as radically into the sphere of politics. Tillich's writings about religious Socialism belong to his oeuvre just as much as the theology of culture, radicalism just as much as sharp analysis. For this purpose, I will analyze in the first part of this thesis Tillich's thoughts on religious Socialism during his years in Germany 1919-1933 systematically and chronologically.

In the second part of this thesis, I am going to follow Tillich's critical impulses in order to make religious Socialism useful for the *kairos* of the present and bring his thoughts in conversation with modern progressive American theologians. Since I had to limit my scope, I decided to concentrate on the three most prolific, progressive, and influential developments in contemporary theology: Revolutionary Christianity, as represented by Cornel West; Black Liberation Theology, as represented by James Cone; and Womanist Theology, as represented by Katie Cannon. Additionally, I would like to briefly refer to the social gospel movement, since I compare Tillich as a European representative of religious Socialism to developments in contemporary North American theology while neglecting that the United States has its very own progressive movement that has greatly influenced the theopolitical developments throughout the world.

My thesis will conclude with a statement for why religious Socialism and the oeuvre of the early Tillich still matter today.

# Part One – Paul Tillich and the Kairos of the Past

## Introduction

Given the wide variety of personalities and motivations among those German theologians that identified as religious Socialists, it is simply impossible to agree upon a concise definition of religious Socialism. This shows already the interesting fact that the best-known religious Socialist in the German-speaking world besides Paul Tillich is certainly Karl Barth – two theologians, who could not be more different from each other.<sup>1</sup> I will therefore chronologically trace only Tillich's publications on (religious) Socialism in order to approach the term. Special attention is thereby given to his publication *The Socialist Decision* of 1933 since it can be seen as the culmination in Tillich's intellectual engagement with (religious) Socialism. He originally published writings on the renewal of Christian Socialism, whose roots can be traced back to Adolf Stöcker, Friedrich Naumann, Christoph Blumhardt, and Adolf von Harnack's Evangelical Social Congress,<sup>2</sup> turned then to religious Socialism,<sup>3</sup> until he finally developed the concept of *gläubiger Realismus* [believing realism] in *The Socialist Decision*. Believing realism is not only declared by Tillich to be the basis of Socialism, but later also the starting point for his theology of the *Neues Sein* [New Being], in which the concept of the *Neue Schöpfung* [New Creation] reappears that he had already used in his socialist writings as a kind of socialist utopia.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Barth and Tillich are nevertheless concise examples for the fact that there were also many commonalities within the movement - both joined the SPD out of conviction (Tillich already in 1929; Barth with the strengthening of National Socialism in 1931), both condemned the liberal Protestant establishment in their own way, and in both theologies traces of a radical conception of Pauline doctrine of faith and grace can be found. Moreover, both were acquainted with Emmanuel Hirsch and therefore able to imagine already very early on into what a disaster German Protestant theology was heading.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Gary Dorrien: *Social Democracy in the making. Political and Religious Roots of European Socialism*, New Haven and London 2019, pp. 16-18.

<sup>3</sup> However, it should be noted that religious Socialism for Tillich is Christian in essence.

## From Prussian Nationalism to Neo-Marxist Religious Socialism

Tillich belonged to a group of German scholars that had survived World War I, were influenced by Karl Marx, and that took moreover Eduard Bernstein's reformist critique of Marxism seriously. Yet, while Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, Friedrich Pollock, Max Horkheimer, and others were mainly engaged in the philosophical debate about the essence of Marxism in the 1920s,<sup>4</sup> Tillich was mostly engaged in developing his neo-Marxist form of religious Socialism. The monarchist Tillich had become a proponent of Socialism after his time as a field preacher in the war and his experiences with German nationalism. For at the beginning of World War I, he was still a typical monarchist from the educated bourgeoisie who had enjoyed a Prussian authoritarian upbringing and preached nationalist theology of war.<sup>5</sup>

Only the experience of the World War and the political catastrophe made me able to break through this system of authorities and to gain faith in democratic ideals and a social revolution.<sup>6</sup>

Tillich later names the Battle of Champagne in 1915 in an interview with the TIME Magazine as the turning point at which he realized that he could not simply continue to preach about patriotic self-sacrifice in the name of God. Tillich describes how he spent all night tending to the wounded and to the dying.

A night attack came, and all night long I moved among the wounded and dying as they were brought in – many of them my close friends. All that horrible, long night I walked along the rows of dying men, and much of my German classical philosophy broke down that night.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cp. Dorrien: *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Cp. Dorrien: *loc. cit.*, p. 272 et seq.

<sup>6</sup> My translation of Paul Tillich: *Begegnungen. Tillich über sich selbst und andere*, in: Renate Albrecht (Ed.): *Gesammelte Werke Band XII*, Stuttgart 1971, p. 62: "Erst das Erlebnis des Weltkrieges und der politischen Katastrophe machten mich fähig, dieses System von Autoritäten zu durchbrechen und den Glauben an demokratische Ideale und eine soziale Revolution zu gewinnen."

<sup>7</sup> TIME Magazine issue 47 "To Be or Not to Be?" March 16th, 1959.

In the same interview, Tillich elaborates on how he was inspired instead by Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, noting that not only classical German philosophy but also the traditional Protestant concept of God was dead.<sup>8</sup>

In August 1918, Tillich was transferred to Spandau. He experienced there the November Revolution as a sympathizer of the rebellious workers firmly convinced that Germany needed a real socialist revolution.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, Tillich started to identify with the independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) and even gave a lecture on Christianity and Socialism to USPD members on May 14, 1919. In response to a critical question from the Brandenburg consistory, he discussed his ideas in more fundamental terms and spoke of the universality of Christianity, which in principle could enter into an exchange with any form of economy or society. Dialectically, however, he added that Christians must of course support the pursuit of justice and freedom.<sup>10</sup>

### **1919-1924: A Time of Creative Chaos**

During his time as a private lecturer in Berlin during the winter of 1919, Tillich, together with other philosophical and theologically like-minded colleagues, founded the so-called *Kairos Kreis* (named after Tillich's term for theological consideration of history). From 1920 to 1927, the circle published the *Blätter für religiösen Sozialismus*, in which Tillich developed and discussed many of his socialist ideas.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cp. *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Cp. Paul Tillich: *My search for absolutes*, New York 1967, S. 39 and Wilhelm & Marion Pauck: *Paul Tillich. His life and thought*, New York 1976, p. 55 et seq.

<sup>10</sup> Cp. Peter Haigis: *Theologische Wegmarken in einem wilden Gelände. Biographisches und Werkbiographisches aus den Jahren 1919-1925*, in: Ilona Nord, Yorick Spiegel (Eds.): *Spurensuche. Lebens- und Denkwege Paul Tillichs*, Tillich Studien Band 5, Münster 2001, p. 105-120, here p. 106 and Paul Tillich: *Impressionen und Reflexionen. Ein Lebensbild in Aufsätzen, Reden und Stellungnahmen*, in: Renate Albrecht (Ed.): *Gesammelte Werke Band XII* (hereinafter cited as GW XIII), Stuttgart 1972, pp. 155-157.

<sup>11</sup> Cp. Haigis: *loc. cit.*, S.116 et seq.

In 1919, under the title *Christentum und Sozialismus*,<sup>12</sup> he presented his first article on the relation between Socialism and Christianity. Tillich describes Socialism as the product of the spiritual and economic development which powerfully began with the Renaissance, continued with the Reformation, and ended with early capitalism dismaying the medieval culture of authority and unity. As he outlines, Socialism must be seen against the background of these developments, especially against the Reformation which broke through a system of authority and arbitrariness thereby replacing it with individual conscience and world-shaping reason. This new human consciousness, as he calls it, finds its negative expression in the flare-up of a new consciousness of solidarity and in the (socialist) struggle against feudalism, capitalism, nationalism, and denominationalism. However, Socialism lacks for Tillich a positive expression, namely a unifying sense of community. Only Christianity would be able to create unity from the ultimate depths of the human being, where the unconditional stirs in the soul. He assumes in his 1919 article that a unity of Socialism and Christianity would be possible into a new form of faith and life. A year later, however, in an article with the same title,<sup>13</sup> Tillich emphasizes that both Christianity and Socialism are in a constant state of flux and thus could not be compared, notwithstanding that religious Socialism is a decidedly Christian (or Protestant) concern:

Thus, Christianity and Socialism must continue to develop and become one in a new world and social order, the basis of which is an economic order shaped by justice, the ethos of which is an affirmation of every human being for the sake of its being human, and the religious content of which is an experience of the divine in all that is human, of the eternal in all that is temporal.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cp. Paul Tillich: *Christentum und soziale Gestaltung. Frühe Schriften zum religiösen Sozialismus*, in: Renate Albrecht (Ed.): *Gesammelte Werke Band II*, Stuttgart 1962, pp. 21-28 (hereinafter cited as Tillich: *GW II*). First published in: *Das neue Deutschland* 8 (1919), pp. 106-110.

<sup>13</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 29-33. First published in: *Freideutsche Jugend* 6 (1920), pp. 167-170.

<sup>14</sup> Cp. My translation of Tillich: *GW II*, p. 33: "So müssen Christentum und Sozialismus sich fortentwickeln und eins werden in einer neuen Welt- und Gesellschaftsordnung, deren Grundlage eine durch Gerechtigkeit gestaltete Wirtschaftsordnung, deren Ethos eine Bejahung jedes Menschen um deswillen, daß er Mensch ist, und deren religiöser Gehalt ein Erleben des Göttlichen in allem Menschlichen, des Ewigen in allem Zeitlichen ist."

In 1923, Tillich followed up on this thought by outlining the *Grundlinien des religiösen Sozialismus*<sup>15</sup> [basic principles of religious Socialism]. The inner attitude of religious Socialism would have to be a prophetic one, as the fate of the entire socialist movement depends on whether or not Socialism could reveal its prophetic power in the *kairos*. The *kairos* represents for Tillich the fulfilled moment of time, in which the present and the future, respectively the given and the demanded sacred, touch each other. From this contact productive tensions emerges, evoking the new creation, and finally uniting sacred content and intended form. The *kairos* thus gives religious Socialism its objective, namely theonomy: the unity of sacred form and sacred content in a concrete historical situation, creating a sacred and at the same time just reality. Religious Socialism is consequently for Tillich nothing else than the community of those who are in the consciousness of the *kairos*.

These thoughts on religious Socialism, developed from 1919 to 1924 during Tillich's years in Berlin, all still seem very productively chaotic and coincide with Tillich's biography, who could well be described as a bohemian during this phase of his life.<sup>16</sup>

### **1924-1932: A Time of Settlement**

In the spring of 1924, Tillich was appointed to his first professorship in Marburg, where he was able to further develop his thoughts on theology, culture, and, of course, on religious Socialism in an animated exchange with Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Heidegger.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 91-120. First published in: *Blätter für den Religiösen Sozialismus* (1923).

<sup>16</sup> Note: Tillich himself speaks of a phase of "creative chaos," cp. Paul Tillich: *Autobiographical Reflections*, in: Charles Kegley [et al.] (eds.): *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, New York 1952, pp. 3-21, here p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Cp. John Newport and Bob Patterson: *Paul Tillich*, Waco (Texas) 1984, pp. 30-32.

In 1924, he wrote about *Die religiöse und philosophische Weiterbildung des Sozialismus*<sup>18</sup> [the continuing religious and philosophical development of Socialism]. Science could only develop out of reality, which would be why socialist theory must also develop further. In this essay, Tillich also deals with the *kairos* and describes it as the *Moment der gegenwärtigen schöpferischen Verwirklichung* [moment of the present creative fulfillment], in which historicity manifests itself as a gift and as a demand. However, it is not entirely clear what consequences of the *kairos* arise for the present. One can read the essay like Markus Wriedt and argue that the *kairos* provokes ethical-religious principles for the respective present and that it calls upon *the mass*<sup>19</sup> to become creatively active themselves.<sup>20</sup> Or like Riccardo Bavajs, who argues that Tillich meant with the historical moment of the creative fulfillment the then present and saw in this an epochal historical turning point, which should lead into the new theonomic age of the unconditioned.<sup>21</sup>

In 1925, Tillich was first appointed to a tenured professorship in Dresden; from 1927 onward, he also lectured in Leipzig. During this time, he not only absorbed the culture, diversity, and openness of large cities which he had missed in the rather provincial Marburg,<sup>22</sup> but also participated in a conference for religious Socialism in Heppenheim 1928. This conference not only helped him to fathom out the theoretical foundations of Socialism even

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<sup>18</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 121-131. First published in: *Blätter für Religiösen Sozialismus* (1924).

<sup>19</sup> Note: Tillich has written a whole essay about what is contained in the term *mass* (cp. Paul Tillich: *Masse und Geist*, in: *GW II*, pp. 35-90). Here are probably all those meant, whom also the socialist movement addresses.

<sup>20</sup> Cp. Markus Wriedt: *Theologie am Ende der ersten deutschen Demokratie. Frankfurt am Main und Paul Tillich*, in: Heiko Schulz und Gerhard Schreiber (Eds.): *Kritische Theologie. Tillich in Frankfurt (1929-1933)*, Berlin [et al.] 2015, pp. 133-194.

<sup>21</sup> Cp. Riccardo Bavajs: *Von den "Gesellschaftsproblemen der Gegenwart" zur "sozialistischen Entscheidung". Paul Tillichs politisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik*, in: *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Religion in den Transformationsprozessen Mittel- und Ostmitteleuropas (2007), pp. 97-127, here S. 99.

<sup>22</sup> Cp. Newport and Patterson: *loc. cit.*, pp. 32 et seq.

more, but in it he already discussed his idea of historical dialectics, which would later find expression in *The Socialist Decision* in the term *Erwartung* [expectation].<sup>23</sup>

In 1929, Tillich was appointed to a tenured professorship in Frankfurt and gave up his teaching posts in Dresden and Leipzig. At the same time, he joined the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in order to prevent the impending rise of National Socialism.<sup>24</sup> In a lecture given to socialist students, in Marburg in 1928 and in Frankfurt am Main in 1929, entitled *Klassenkampf und religiöser Sozialismus*<sup>25</sup> [class struggle and religious Socialism] it becomes clear that Tillich saw himself and his environment quite practically in the reality of class struggle, which religious Socialism had to critically accompany, while at the same time postulating the unconditional and transcending freedom of religious Socialism vis-à-vis the present:

Class struggle is a reality. Those who miss this reality in their forward-looking thoughts also miss the meaning of the future with the depth of the present. In truth, those are outside of reality. But insofar as Socialism is religious and actuality has a right to call itself so, it stands at the same time beyond the merely actual situation.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, Tillich already anticipated his later ontological reflections in the lecture: a religious understanding of Socialism would be only possible starting from the human being. If the human being rises above itself, being becomes according to Tillich meaning. One would have the freedom to decide between sense fulfillment and sense failure. Freedom, as he states, cannot be equated with the fulfillment of meaning; in freedom, one can also be unfree and miss ones meaning. Tillich calls it the *Bedrohtheit* [threatenedness] of human existence. In contrast to

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<sup>23</sup> Cp. Paul Tillich: *The Socialist Decision*, New York 1977, p. xvii (preface).

<sup>24</sup> Cp. Newport and Patterson: *loc. cit.*, pp. 33 et seq.

<sup>25</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, S. 175-192. First published in: *Paul Tillich: Religiöse Verwirklichung*, Berlin 1930, pp. 65-87.

<sup>26</sup> My translation of Tillich: *GW II*, p. 175: "Klassenkampf ist eine Realität. Wer in seinen nach vorn gerichteten Gedanken an dieser Realität vorbeisieht, verfehlt mit der Tiefe der Gegenwart auch den Sinn der Zukunft. Er steht in Wahrheit außerhalb der Realität. Sofern der Sozialismus aber religiös ist und in Wahrheit ein Recht hat, sich so zu nennen, steht er zugleich jenseits der bloß tatsächlichen Lage."

this, there would be the *Getragenheit* [carriedness] of human existence – originating from the beyond of freedom and existence. Both – *Bedrohtheit* and *Getragenheit* – are expressed in created forms of life, which Tillich calls religious. However, they could also remain in the background, while in the foreground only human existence and freedom plays a role. According to Tillich, these forms of life are cultural. The task of religious Socialism is for him thus to make Socialism recognizable as a religious reality and yet to honor both forms of life.<sup>27</sup>

After the *Blätter für Religiösen Sozialismus* had been discontinued in 1927, Tillich co-founded the socialist monthly *Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus* in 1930 and also immediately wrote the editorial under the title *Sozialismus*.<sup>28</sup> Doing so, Tillich changed his terminology and dropped the term *religious Socialism* in order to avoid confusion or false implications and to be able to better elaborate the religious aspect of Socialism.

The name [religious Socialism] encountered a double, seemingly insurmountable misunderstanding. From the religious side it was fought as an attempt to dissolve religion into present Socialism. And from the socialist side religion was understood in the sense of the present churches and therefore the connection of religion and Socialism was rejected. What was sought was an understanding and shaping of Socialism from the point of view of what is ultimately meant in it, and a new concrete realization of religion was sought from that very point of view.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, Tillich describes Socialism as a living venture and a formative force in the present for the future to be found in the sentiment for what is ultimately meant. The ultimate meaning could thereby not be described by anyone but should be expressed in all terms. These ultimate concepts, which give Socialism according to Tillich its meaning, are therefore to be understood

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<sup>27</sup> Note: *Klassenkampf und religiöser Sozialismus* might be one of the most complex writings of the early Tillich. Cp. for a more extensive elaboration Christian Danz [et al.] (Eds.): *Religion und Politik. Internationales Jahrbuch für die Tillich-Forschung* Band 4 (2008), p. 27 et seq.

<sup>28</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 139-150. First published in: *Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus*, 1 Jahrgang Heft 1 (Januar 1930).

<sup>29</sup> My translation of Tillich: *GW II*, p. 143: "Der Name [religiöser Sozialismus] begegnete einem doppelten, anscheinend unüberwindlichen Mißverständnis. Von religiöser Seite wurde er als Versuch bekämpft, die Religion in den gegenwärtigen Sozialismus aufzulösen. Und von sozialistischer Seite wurde Religion im Sinne der gegenwärtigen Kirchen verstanden und darum die Verbindung von Religion und Sozialismus abgelehnt. Gesucht war ein Verständnis und eine Gestaltung des Sozialismus von dem her, was in ihm letztgemeint ist, und gesucht war eine neue konkrete Verwirklichung der Religion von eben daher."

as symbols. Every concept of Socialism, such as freedom or community, would consequently mean more than it could directly express. This systematization, as Tillich states, also applies to religious terms, which explains the original composition of the term religious Socialism. The ultimate in Socialism would ultimately be the religious in Socialism.

The most important last-meant term, which includes all others, is for Tillich the term community. Socialism is, as he emphasizes, above all the demand for a community in which it is possible for every individual and every group to fulfill the meaning of their lives, thus the demand for a meaningful society. Hence, for Tillich, Socialism must theoretically and practically pose the question of the meaning of life of each and every individual and every social group, as well as struggle for the answer in reality and in thought. In this way, Socialism becomes according to Tillich a movement with universal aspirations. A movement that is the basis of intellectual and political shaping, i.e., the shaping of everything that can be shaped.

However, he could not completely detach himself from the concept of religious Socialism. In the same issue of *Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus* in which he had published the editorial on Socialism, he also published an essay under the title *Religiöser Sozialismus*,<sup>30</sup> in which he once again tried to explain exactly what religious Socialism is and why the term is so important to him despite all criticism. In addition, in 1931, Tillich contributed the encyclopedia article *Religiöser Sozialismus* to *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* [Religion in History and Present] once again systematically explaining the term religious Socialism.<sup>31</sup> An observation, which speaks against Christian Danz, who assumes not only a change in Tillich's argumentation in 1930, but even that Tillich had abandoned the term religious Socialism as of 1930.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 151-158. First published in: *Neuen Blätter für den Sozialismus*, 1 Jahrgang Heft 1 (Januar 1930).

<sup>31</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 159-174. First published in: Hermann Gunkel [et al.] (Eds.): *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* Band 5 (RGG 2), Tübingen: 1931 (2nd edition), pp. 637-648.

<sup>32</sup> Contra Danz: *loc. cit.*, p. 25.

In 1932, Tillich became the Dean of the philosophical faculty and helped to establish the famous Institute for Social Research. The rapid rise of the National Socialists prompted him to attack them directly in *Zehn Thesen*<sup>33</sup> [Ten Theses] and to call on Protestantism to oppose the paganism of the swastika at all costs. Especially the Prussian attack on July 20 worried Tillich very much and led to the writing of *The Socialist Decision*.<sup>34</sup>

### 1933: The Socialist Decision

Tillich's publication *The Socialist Decision* in early 1933 is based on a lecture he gave in October 1931 at the Hochschule für Politik (now Otto Suhr Institute of the Free University) in Berlin. In this writing, the question of religious Socialism, or a religious vision for Socialism, remains in the background. Rather, Tillich has a kind of *gläubiger Realismus* [believing realism] as the basis of Socialism in mind.<sup>35</sup>

Socialism has no right to intoxicate people with visions of the future and then dash their hopes. It has to be sober in its analysis, and sober in the attitude of expectation it assumes. It must unmask all ideologies, including its own. Only with apprehension and with the sharpest of self-criticism may it seek for syntheses. The harshness of the proletarian fate and the burden of the socialist struggle against the "powers that be" allow us no ecstasies or glorifications. Socialism requires the clearest, most sober realism, but this must be a believing realism, a realism of expectation.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, as Tillich adds, his call for Socialism has to be understood out of believing realism.

As one can see, Tillich already sketches in the preface the area of tension between which the writing moves: to avert the then current fate of failure and collapse of the socialist

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<sup>33</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW XIII*, pp. 177-179. First published in: Leopold Klotz (Ed.): *Die Kirche und das dritte Reich. Fragen und Forderungen deutscher Theologen*, Band I, Gotha 1932, pp. 126-128.

<sup>34</sup> Cp. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf: '*Politische Romantik*' und '*Sozialistische Entscheidung*', in: *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte (JHMTh/ZNThG)* issue 19/2 (2012), pp. 247–268, here p. 249.

<sup>35</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 219-365. First published as Paul Tillich: *Die sozialistische Entscheidung*, Potsdam 1933 (= *Die sozialistische Aktion*. Schriftenreihe der Neuen Blätter für den Sozialismus, Heft 2). [Citations in square brackets will follow the already cited English edition from 1977]

<sup>36</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, p. 224 [pp. xxxvi et seq.].

movement, to unify it, and to clearly demarcate it from National Socialism.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note that he describes the struggles within the socialist movement as a conflict of three generations. The older generation, which would find itself in the leadership of the SPD, is for him determined by the positivism of the 19th century and driven by a "'scientific' faith in a process of development that will lead inevitably to a socialist society"<sup>38</sup> as well as by placing the whole socialist fight in this process. The younger generation on the other hand, as Tillich describes, had actively experienced the Russian Revolution and had seen above all the tremendous forces of will that came alive in it and "against all expectations proved victorious in that economically backward country."<sup>39</sup> Tillich sees himself as a representative of an intermediate generation, which has to build a bridge between the younger and the older generation. This generation would hold fast to Marxism but reject the positivism of the 19th century of the older and the activism of the younger generation. Instead, as Tillich emphasizes, this intermediate generation falls back on the dialectic of necessity and freedom, holds back on defining the relationship between communism and Socialism, and moreover continues to support the Social Democratic Party.<sup>40</sup> Polemically toward representatives of the younger

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<sup>37</sup> The preface is dated November 9th, 1932, which is probably meant to allude to the events of November 9th, 1918 (cp. Graf: *loc. cit.*, p. 257). Some authors, like Graf, assume that Tillich wanted to win the National Socialists for true Socialism (cp. Graf: *loc. cit.*, p. 258). I would disagree with this reading of Tillich. As will be shown, Tillich clearly demarcates the *sozialistisches Prinzip* [socialist principle] from revolutionary political romanticism, which, according to Tillich, includes National Socialism. In my mind, he was rather concerned about the National Socialist *Mitläufer* [fellow travelers] from the proletariat, but that he by no means harbored the illusion of being able to convince the ideological leaders of National Socialism.

<sup>38</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, p. 221 [p. xxxiii].

<sup>39</sup> Tillich: *ibid.* [p. xxxiv]. Note: This can certainly be read as a pointed remark towards the older generation, which, as for example in the person of Karl Kautsky, assumed the materialistic conception of history in the best orthodox Marxist and left Hegelian manner. According to the latter, society must develop from the lower to the higher; from the simple to the complex (Feudalism-Capitalism-Socialism). The October Revolution in feudal and agrarian Russia did not seem to fit into this progressive concept of history. Rosa Luxemburg is probably the best-known "representative" of this "generation" shaped by the Russian Revolution (Luxemburg is only 17 years younger than Kautsky, which is why the term generation is not particularly well chosen, in my opinion).

<sup>40</sup> One archetypal representative of this generation is Eduard Bernstein, who led the SPD away from Marxist orthodoxy and toward pragmatic social reformism and influenced Tillich (cp. Dorrien: *loc. cit.*, pp. 16-18). However, Tillich also criticizes the dispute between reformists and revisionists

generation, above all the members of the Communist Party around Rosa Luxemburg, he adds: "Socialism cannot wait for its realization until the proletarian world revolution."<sup>41</sup>

In the introduction, Tillich goes on to elaborate that Socialism must first of all investigate the reasons for its weakening, which has led it into the predicament of the 1930s. This can only be done, he argues, if Socialism goes back to its roots. In order to find and understand these, the roots of political thought itself must be uncovered, which are found in human existence. Human existence, in turn, is formed by consciousness – both present a unity. First of all, there would be the origin-mythical consciousness. Following Martin Heidegger, Tillich describes it as *Geworfensein*: A person did already find themselves and their environment in such a way, which meant that they had an origin outside of themselves. Out of this situation results the question of the human being about its *whence*. It is answered by the so-called myth of origin.

The origin is creative. Something new springs into being, something that did not previously exist and now is something with its own character over against the origin. We experience ourselves as posited, yet also as independent. Our life proceeds in a tension between dependence on the origin and independence. For the origin does not let us go; it is not something that was and is no longer, once we become independent selves. Rather, we are continually dependent on the origin; it bears us, it creates us anew at every moment, and thereby holds us fast. The origin brings us forth as something new and singular; but it takes us, as such, back to the origin again. Just in being born we become involved in having to die. [...] This has been expressed in myth in infinitely diverse ways, according to the things and events in which a particular envisages its origin. In all mythology, however, there resounds the cyclical law of birth and death. Every myth is a myth of origin, that is, an answer to the question about the "Whence" of existence and an expression of dependence of the origin and on its power.<sup>42</sup>

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and the reformists' need for harmony in realpolitik. As an example, he cites their alliance with the trade unions (cp. Tillich: *GW II*, p. 284 [p. 131]).

<sup>41</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, S. 223 [p. xxxv]. Note: Here, too, the term "generation" fits only to a limited extent. Rosa Luxemburg - like many representatives of the "young" generation - is 15 years older than Tillich and was assassinated in 1919. I assume that Tillich alludes mainly to Luxemburg and the representatives of the KPD, since the term "proletarian world revolution" was used in German-speaking countries mainly by the KPD (see, among others, the minutes of the founding party conference of the Communist Party of Germany December 30th, 1918 - January 1st, 1919 <https://www.marxists.org/deutsch/geschichte/deutsch/kpd/1918/index.htm>, last retrieved on January 5, 2021).

<sup>42</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, p. 227 [3 et seq.].

For politics, according to Tillich, it is applicable that the origin–mythical consciousness is the root of conservative thinking.

The second question that the human being would inevitably ask itself is the question of *whither*. This question opens the horizon away from the fulfillment of what already is to what should be. The "Whither?" thus transcends the boundaries of the "Whence?" and gives the human being the possibility to realize something absolutely new. This also makes it clear that the human being is not only its own self; through the knowledge of its own self, it has the possibility to go also beyond itself.

This is human freedom, not that one has a so-called "free-will," but that as a human being one is not bound to what one finds in existence, that one is subject to a demand that something unconditionally new should be realized through oneself. Thus the cycle of birth and death is broken; the existence and the actions of human beings are not confined within a mere development of their origin. Wherever this consciousness prevails, the tie of the origin has been dissolved in principle.<sup>43</sup>

Hence, for politics, the breaking of the myth of origins would be the root of democratic, liberal, and socialist thought.

The question "Whither?" and thus the breaking of the myth of origin is of course of higher value for him than the question "Whence?", due to the fact that in the "Whither?" the "Whence?" is equally fulfilled, as the origin of the human being is essentially a demand - an ought. This demand expresses itself concretely in the encounter of *I* and *Thou*, as in this the *Thou* must be granted the same dignity as the *I*, namely "the dignity of being free, of being the bearer of the fulfillment implied in the origin. This recognition of the equal dignity of the 'Thou' and the 'I' is justice."<sup>44</sup> The unconditional demand thus opposes being with justice, which becomes the true power of being and fulfills what is truly original. Opposed to this, however, would still be the destructive powers of the unbroken origin, keeping being in a tragic and violent cycle. In

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<sup>43</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, p. 228 [p. 5].

<sup>44</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, p. 229 [p. 6].

order to achieve justice, the myth of origin could thus inevitably only be allowed to influence political thinking in a broken way.<sup>45</sup>

After the preface and introduction, the work unfolds into a total of three parts, which are discussed below.

In the first part, Tillich describes the emergence and impact of the unbroken mythical powers of origin. In doing so, he is particularly concerned to outline the decisive groups of powers of origin that at the same time have outstanding political significance. He first identifies vegetative myths of origin (soil myths) that evoke a sense of homeland and/or national consciousness and that usually appear violently in politics. Based on this, he names animalistic myths of origin (blood myths), which appear in particular in the encounter (or in the fight) with foreign powers and should express a special election. To the third authoritative group belong, according to Tillich, the myths of origin of the social group, which show themselves above all in the (social) bond of a human being to its own father and demand the classification into a certain group. As he emphasizes, the origin could be broken if there is also a break with one's own social group - or with the classifications in social groups in general. For Tillich, this can be demanded in prophecy.<sup>46</sup> He goes on and describes how the myth of origin was broken in Jewish prophecy.

The bond of origin between God and his people is broken if the bond of the law is broken by the people. Thus the myth of origin is shattered – and this is the world-historical mission of Jewish prophetism. With the breaking of the tie to the soil, the other forms of the myth of origin also lose their power. The sacred aristocracy, including the monarchy, is rejected for the sake of righteousness. The claim of belonging to the people avails nothing in face of the unconditional demand, on account of which the alien can be held in equal, indeed, in higher esteem. The priestly tradition is not abolished but is judged by the demand of righteousness, and its cultic aspects are devalued. The breaking of the myth of origin becomes evident, finally, in the prophets' opposition to the priests.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Note: Tillich develops a very formal concept of justice in the introduction in order to guarantee absolute validity in the sense of Kantian formalism. See Tillich: *GW II*, footnote 6, p. 229 [p. 164].

<sup>46</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 235 et seq. [pp. 13-15].

<sup>47</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, p. 241 [p. 20].

Christianity had adopted this spirit of Judaism in the form of the Old Testament but could not prevent the return of the powers of origin (soil, blood, and social group membership), which had already been broken by Jewish prophecy. Tillich is explicitly against any *Blut und Boden* [blood-and-soil] ideology in the name of Christianity: "The power of being as such was declared holy in the name of Christianity. This comes to clearest expression when the Christian church serves to confirm the given sociopolitical power structures and the nation's claims to dominance."<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the Jews would be the true *Volk ohne Raum* [people without space].<sup>49</sup> Only the spirit of Judaism with its protest against the origin-mythical ties in Judaism as well as in Christianity could help the "whither?" to win. Christianity thus inevitably belongs on the side of Judaism as the enemy of political romanticism,<sup>50</sup> which acts anti-Semitic: "A Christianity that abandons its prophetic foundation by allying itself with political romanticism has lost its own identity."<sup>51</sup>

While the prophetic has the power to break the myth of origin and its power, it cannot completely negate it, since prophetic consciousness still needs the father as a myth, for example

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<sup>48</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, p. 242 [p. 21].

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Note: The term *Volk ohne Raum* is definitely not at all chosen by accident and establishes a clear connection to the National Socialist *Blut und Boden* ideology.

<sup>50</sup> Note: "Political Romanticism" is the title of a book by Carl Schmitt published in 1919. What exactly Tillich means by this term remains unclear at this point. For Schmitt, the romantic is someone who escapes from reality into a pathetic and dreamlike rush of emotion. The political romantic makes politics a concomitant effect: "An impression suggested by historical and political reality is supposed to become the occasion for subjective creativity. When the subject lacks real aesthetic – in other words, lyrical-musical – productivity, an argument develops out of historical, philosophical, theological, or some other scientific material, an intellectual music for a political program." (Carl Schmitt: *Politische Romantik*, Munich and Leipzig 1919, p.109 [quote derived from the 2011 Transaction Publishers English edition, p. 160]). Thus, the Romantic is prone to political aberrations. If Tillich really has Schmitt in mind, then from today's perspective this seems like a clear criticism of the fact that Schmitt himself practiced *subjektiver Ocasionalismus* [subjectified occasionalism] (cp. on this term Schmitt: *loc. cit.*, p.23 [p. 18]) and thus became a political romantic himself by euphorically supporting the new rulers in 1933. I do not think that there is even remote evidence of Tillich adopting Schmitt's decisionism, as Markus Wriedt, among others, claims (cp. on this: Wriedt: *loc. cit.*, p. 194).

<sup>51</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, p. 243 [p. 22]. Note: Clear criticism of nationalist theology and parts of German liberal theology.

as a ruler of history and as a creator figure. Only the autonomous consciousness that began with the Enlightenment is able to completely destroy these prophetic ties to the father.

Traditions cannot withstand the demands for a rational structuring of existence. Revelation becomes a historical process as "the education of the human race." The priesthood is deprived of its power through the rational criticism of miracles and mysteries. Ecstasies are supplanted by sober research and purposeful action. Entities are not viewed as impenetrable, primordial phenomena that coinhere with one another, but as a lawful sequence of analyzable elements. Just as there is nothing that cannot be solved by thinking, so there is nothing that cannot be shaped by action. The myth of origin has lost its power.<sup>52</sup>

The Enlightenment was able to break the power of myths, but they were not completely eradicated: mentally, the powers of Eros, fate, and death; socially, the old powers (nobility, landowners, peasantry, priesthood, crafts), which can also appear in a new form (civil servants, employees, officers), escaped rationality. These powers react, according to Tillich, with instinctive resistance to the incorporation into the system of rationality.

Of course, they finally do accommodate themselves to the rational system on account of its material power and its economic advantages. In the moment, however, that this material power is reduced and the advantages turn into disadvantages, the instinctive counterforces are revived with double strength.<sup>53</sup>

Political romanticism originates from the unification of all counterforces against the rational system. As a countermovement, it tries to restore the myth of origin broken by reason and prophecy - spiritually and socially.

Political romanticism is, thus, the countermovement to prophetism and the Enlightenment on the basis of a spiritual and social situation that is determined by prophetism and the Enlightenment.<sup>54</sup>

There are two manifestations of political romanticism: The conservative form tries to defend the social and spiritual remnants of the attachment to the origin against autonomy and reason; the revolutionary directly attacks the rational system in order to create new ties to the origin.

The two forms of political romanticism, despite the differences in their concept of the goal, are united in their desire to return to the origin – not in a general way, but to the particular powers of origin from which prophetism and bourgeois society have broken

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<sup>52</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, S. 245 [p. 24].

<sup>53</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, S. 246 [p. 25].

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* [pp. 25 et seq.].

away. All their political demands are basically to be understood in terms of this return to the origin.<sup>55</sup>

Tillich demonstrates this with all three groups of original powers mentioned above: Land myths would be revived by the strict separation of national and global economic space. Blood myths, as he describes, have found a new shape in a seemingly scientific race theory, which is supposed to ideologically justify the political and economic claim to rule of one's own people.

This mythology of blood assumes its most passionate forms in anti-Semitism, for here economic opposition is coupled with the rejection of the prophetic element in Judaism, a view that has given all Germanic blood-mythology a bad conscience ever since Christianization set in.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, female menstruation is misused to create a mythology of blood that pushes everything female out of the public and the political sphere and back into the patriarchal family. Finally, the call for a *Volksgemeinschaft* [national community] expresses the myths of social group membership.

According to Tillich, all these myths could not have been created out of nothing but need traditions that link the myths of origin to the present. Since there are, especially in Germany, breaks in traditions and historical disruptions, many traditions are found only in literary memories. Political romanticism nevertheless clings convulsively to these very traditions.<sup>57</sup> At this point, Tillich criticizes the National Socialists quite directly.

The attempt to create a unity bound to the origin by means of the old-Germanic heritage is completely hopeless, since as soon as the Germanic people appeared on the scene of history, they were grasped by the major streams of tradition already in existence and deprived of their original structure. To be sure, the Germanic substance was at work in the adoption and reformulation of these traditions; but there is no such thing as an original Germanic, and hence national, tradition, and such cannot be created.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, p. 250 [p. 29 et seq.].

<sup>56</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 250 et seq. [p. 30].

<sup>57</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 250-254 [pp. 29-32].

<sup>58</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, p. 254 [p. 34].

In consequence, there would as well be no national tradition of Christianity in Germany that could be taken up. The churches must rather beware of National Socialism and its attempt to seek confirmation in the old sacred for supposedly new sacredness.

According to Tillich, political romanticism is becoming more and more entangled in contradictions that it cannot resolve. This is for him particularly evident in the fact that the original mythical thinking does not allow for an autonomous democratic formation of will in the form of a competition of ideas and parties. Therefore, any political romanticism could at most only use political parties as a frontage (conservative form) or impose its will directly on the people (revolutionary form). His criticism of the revolutionary form reads like a direct criticism of National Socialism: it would be built on hierarchy and authority up to the *Führer*, whose enthusiastic worship most strongly expresses the (voluntary) loss of one's own autonomy and has as its goal the dissolution of all parties.

However, Tillich could not simply ignore the events of the 1920s and early 1930s. He explains the rise of revolutionary political romanticism (of National Socialism) primarily as an expression of an alliance with the old ruling class of the rational system, also known as the capital rule of the bourgeoisie. This alliance would have as its solely purpose the preventing the rise of the true proletariat. Paradoxically, capitalist imperialism and the myth of origins are thus united in a national power-state idea as the fear of becoming proletarianized is transformed into willingness to fight the proletariat. The only thing political romanticism is right about, according to Tillich, is its protest against the dehumanizing consequences of the rational system.<sup>59</sup>

In the second part, he criticizes that the Enlightenment led not only to the breaking of the original bond, but also to what Tillich calls the *bourgeois principle*: The original ties became dissolved into rationally manageable elements, which are simply constructions for thought and

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<sup>59</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 255-263 [pp. 35-44].

action. Hence, the *bourgeois principle* would lead to the absolute profanation of being, causing, because of the complete elimination of the connection to origin, the complete reification of all being. The human being and the world consequently become ends in themselves, respectively determinate elements. Due to the fact that the clear rule of the original powers is no longer given, it comes however to the subject-object or rule-freedom problem. From the side of the object, positivism has developed an answer, from the side of the subject, Kantianism. Tillich clearly sides with Kantianism and emphasizes that in a liberal democracy the subject is not only the bearer of reason, but also the bearer of (state) power. The problem of bourgeois society, nevertheless, is that there is an accumulation of capital, which causes the harmony between the equal members of liberal democracy to falter. For the *laissez faire* (the free play of productive forces in society) was overridden by the unrestricted economic striving of individuals, who joined together to form power groups. Liberalism therefore degenerated into a farce and gave way to a new feudal class society.<sup>60</sup>

*In the face of the split between classes, the democratic belief in harmony as held by the bourgeoisie is shattered; in the face of bourgeois class rule, the democratic belief in harmony as held by Socialism collapses. [...] The renunciation of the democratic principle in the class struggle, the necessity – which is becoming ever clearer – to secure dominion despite the lack of a majority, introduces a severe conflict between present and future into Socialism.<sup>61</sup>*

Thus, after its victory, the proletariat is definitely above the *democratic principle*, which justifies the usage – even if only symbolically – of the term *dictatorship of the proletariat*.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 265-269 [pp. 47-53].

<sup>61</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, p. 276 [pp. 59-62].

<sup>62</sup> Note: Tillich does not see himself as an orthodox Marxist, so it is quite remarkable that he uses and even defends the Marxist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat here. Of course, the subordination of the democratic principle to the rule of the proletariat is a problem. However, to put him in the corner of political romanticism because of this or to accuse him of tending towards National Socialism, as Erich Schwerdtfeger, among others, does in his dissertation (cp. Erich Schwerdtfeger: *Die politische Theorie in der Theologie Paul Tillichs*, Marburg 1969) is in my opinion equally problematic. The relationship between (parliamentary) democracy and Socialism occupied Tillich throughout his life. Tillich rather described which system of rule he did not want (liberal democracy; socialist rule by councils; authoritarian regime). As Riccardo Bavaj shows very nicely, it is completely unclear how Tillich's utopian social order between original forces and democracy as corrective (cp. e.g., Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 346-48) could look like and how it relates to his formal concept of justice (cp. Bavaj: *ibid.*). I therefore agree with Bavaj's judgment that "Tillich's political world of

Nonetheless, a tension lies in the fact that here an inner conflict of Socialism gets revealed. Whereas Socialism has also the conviction that the world can be controlled with reason, shaping an economic and social order which is appropriate to all people on earth, it does not believe that this order is already existent as an invisible harmony. Rather, for Socialism, to let the forces of production take their course leads to disharmony. Therefore, Socialism has for Tillich to convert the belief in harmony into eschatological anticipation. Nevertheless, doing so, leads to an inner conflict as there is a constant alternation between hope and disappointment, utopia and compromise.<sup>63</sup>

In the third part, Tillich devotes himself to the question of how this inner conflict could be resolved. Since the contradiction of Socialism is based on the situation of the proletariat, a solution can only come out of the proletariat. Especially the dehumanization by the *bourgeois principle*, which shows itself in capitalism and imperialism, must lead to the rise of the proletariat. For Tillich, the proletarian movement is the only possible reaction against the threat of falling prey to complete human reification through economic reification. Hence, the proletarian movement is not simply the socialist struggle of the workers but reaches further. He also counts other social struggles, such as the struggle for gender justice, the struggles of the youth, the struggle of trade unions and cooperatives, the struggles of religious, educational, and spiritual groups, etc. to the proletarian movement.

All of these elements, to which a considerable number of others could be added, are, to be sure, colored by the class structure and by a socialist consciousness. But they also have a large significance. They are not restricted to specific social classes. They belong quite generally to the history of humanity as such. The proletariat has these qualities too, and through them it is related to the other groups. The primordial elements of human existence are active among the proletariat; and only because this is the case can there be a proletariat and a Socialism that constitutes a struggle for humanity, a defense against the destruction of the human by the bourgeois principle.<sup>64</sup>

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thought [...] revealed the hiatus between clear rejection of the existing and nebulous projection of contourless counter-concepts, which was typically for the entire Weimar left-wing intelligentsia [...]" (Bavaj: *loc. cit.*, p.126).

<sup>63</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 278-305 [pp. 63-71]

<sup>64</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 308 et seq. [p. 100].

In this way, the bond of origin and the proletariat are not in opposition to each other. The proletarian movement, however, builds only on the original forces, which have already been broken by the *bourgeois principle*. Tillich calls this the *socialist principle*. Three elements are constitutive for it: the recognition of the original forces, the breaking of the harmony, and a clear direction. The *socialist principle* expresses itself symbolically in the expectation, as it expects something that goes beyond the (romantic) myth of origin and the (bourgeois) belief in harmony. Thus, the *socialist principle* also has prophetic moments in itself, especially the expectant look into the future. Tillich speaks symbolically of Socialism as a prophetic movement on the ground of rationality, in which the new breaks into the old. Prophetic expectation is always a combination of demand and promise and not a passive waiting, since expectation always includes concrete action (in Socialism the active struggle against oppression and exploitation). Therefore, only through human action history can follow its path from finding its origin to final expectation.

In concrete terms, the proletarian movement is thus outraged: on the one hand spiritually against the complete reification and profanization by the bourgeois principle, and on the other hand socially against the resulting domination of the bourgeoisie. The main issue would be to bring into the proletarian movement also those who are socially outraged by the rule of the bourgeoisie, but who adhere to revolutionary romanticism (National Socialism).<sup>65</sup>

At the end of the book, Tillich once again sums up how the socialist principle is superior to political romanticism and the bourgeois principle. For him it is clear that the many crises of capitalism rebutted the *bourgeois principle* and that political romanticism remained nothing but helpless in the face of these crises. In the long run, there would be consequently only three possibilities: the implementation of the *socialist principle*, chaos through the *bourgeois principle*, or the victory of political romanticism. For the latter, Tillich already provided a rather

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<sup>65</sup> Cp. Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 306-14; 317; 328; 333 et seq. [pp. 97-153].

gloomy prognosis in 1933, even if at that time he still linked it to the hope for the victory of the proletarian movement.

*Only expectation can triumph over the death now threatening Western civilization through the resurgence of the myth of the origin. And expectation is the symbol of Socialism. If on the other hand political romanticism and, with it, militant nationalism proves victorious, a self-annihilating struggle of the European peoples is inevitable. The salvation of European society from a return to barbarism lies in the hands of Socialism.*<sup>66</sup>

## Reactions and Consequences

The reaction of the National Socialists to Tillich's socialist pamphlet and to his commitment to Socialism came promptly. In particular Tillich's public commitment to Jewish and left-wing students, who had been badly beaten up by members of the *Sturmabteilung* and fellow National Socialist students in July 1932, greatly displeased the new rulers.<sup>67</sup> The first step was to suspend Tillich from his professorship in Frankfurt am Main, starting on April 13th, 1933, then to release him from his duties on September 9th, and finally to dismiss him on December 20th.<sup>68</sup> In the light of the growing pressure on his person, Tillich had no choice but to leave Germany and emigrate to the US. He was thereby one of the first non-Jewish intellectuals to meet such a fate.<sup>69</sup> Most of the printed copies of *The Socialist Decision* were burned on May 10th, 1933, or later pulped.<sup>70</sup> The publication was only available for purchase in isolated cases.<sup>71</sup> The National Socialists saw Tillich's pamphlet not only as a call for Socialism but also as an attack on National Socialism, although some contemporary reviewers would deny that Tillich had really

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<sup>66</sup> Tillich: *GW II*, pp. 364 et seq. [pp. 161 et seq.].

<sup>67</sup> Cp. Newport and Patterson, *loc. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>68</sup> Cp. Universitätsarchiv Frankfurt am Main, Abt. 4, Nr. 226.

<sup>69</sup> Cp. Sim and Parker: *loc. cit.*, p. 352.

<sup>70</sup> Cp. Julius Schoeps and Werner Treß (Eds.): *Orte der Bücherverbrennungen in Deutschland 1933*, Hildesheim [et. al.]: Olms 2008, p. 347.

<sup>71</sup> Cp. Graf: *loc. cit.*, p. 253.

attacked it.<sup>72</sup> Even Tillich's friend Emmanuel Hirsch, himself a convinced National Socialist, did not see *The Socialist Decision* and Tillich's socialist activism as contradictory to National Socialism.

Dear Paul, I have just read in the newspaper - among a number of names that are terrible to me, but for which I feel no sorrow - to my sorrow also your leave of absence. I regret that with this, a development towards National Socialism, which you already sensed in your last book, to which [you] belong (even if you don't know it yet) and to which you should have become a wise and responsible spiritual leader, is questioned here. My heartfelt request is that you - you are, after all, an inwardly relaxed person - not let yourself be distracted but continue to educate yourself purely objectively where you belong, in the new Germany.<sup>73</sup>

At the latest with the publication of Hirsch's book *Die gegenwärtige geistige Lage*<sup>74</sup> it became clear to Tillich why Hirsch was so enthusiastic about *The Socialist Decision*. In Tillich's eyes, *Die gegenwärtige geistige Lage* read like a distortion of his own theological and political thoughts. He also reproached Hirsch for this in an open letter in 1935.<sup>75</sup> With this letter it was not only over with the friendship of the two, but Tillich also became abruptly aware that he had left the categories of religious Socialism partly so far in the dark that they could be used (formally and distorted) to support a completely opposite political program.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Cp. footnote 62.

<sup>73</sup> My translation of a paragraph from an unpublished letter of Emmanuel Hirsch to Paul Tillich, Göttingen April 14th, 1933, in: Andover Harvard Theological Library, Tillich Nachlass: "Lieber Paul, eben lese ich in der Zeitung – unter einer Reihe mir schrecklicher Namen, bei denen ich keinen Schmerz empfinde – zu meinem Schmerze auch Deine Beurlaubung. Ich bedauere, dass damit eine von Dir schon in Deinem letzten Buch spürbare Hinüberentwicklung zum Nationalsozialismus, zu dem [Du] gehörst (auch wenn Du es noch nicht weißt) und dem Du ein kluger und verantwortlicher geistiger Führer hättest werden müssen, so hier in Frage gestellt wird. Meine herzliche Bitte ist, Dich – Du bist ja ein innerlich gelöster Mensch – nicht beirren zu lassen, sondern rein sachlich weiter Dich dahin zu bilden, wo Du hingehörst, ins neue Deutschland."

<sup>74</sup> Cp. Emmanuel Hirsch: *Die gegenwärtige geistige Lage im Spiegel philosophischer und theologischer Besinnung. Akademische Vorlesungen zum Verständnis des deutschen Jahrs 1933*, Göttingen 1934.

<sup>75</sup> Cp. Paul Tillich: *Um was es geht. Antwort an Emanuel Hirsch*, in: *Theologische Blätter* 5/14 (Mai 1935), pp. 117-120.

<sup>76</sup> Cp. James Reimer: *Emanuel Hirsch und Paul Tillich. Theologie und Politik in einer Zeit der Krise*, Berlin 1995, p. 357.

It is advisable to look critically at the diffuse nature of his categories, especially democracy as a corrective, formal justice, and the symbol of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Albeit, to over-interpret these categories and to impute to Tillich a closeness to the National Socialist movement or an affinity for totalitarian systems is, in my opinion, exaggerated.

### **Religious Socialism in Exile**

The fact that National Socialism crushed the religious socialist movement, like the many other creative approaches of the 1920s, forcing it underground or into exile, could not prevent the spread of these ideas into churches and cultures beyond the borders of Germany and Europe.<sup>77</sup>

Tillich makes this statement in the preface to the second volume of his *Gesammelte Werke*, published in 1962, and adds that his theological and philosophical principles remained the same in exile, but that the idea of religious Socialism had changed somewhat due to the different sociological structure of American society. This self-appraisal of Tillich could well be described by the word euphemistic. In reality, he had lost interest in the socialist revolution and Marxist terminology in America and downplayed the Marxist elements in his work.<sup>78</sup>

Due to the fact that Tillich had only refugee status and a temporary contract as a visiting scholar in his first years in America, it is not surprising that he held back on political pronouncements at first. With Reinhold Niebuhr and in so-called social action discussion groups, however, he exchanged vivid ideas about religious Socialism, with Niebuhr reminding him, above all, not to forget the religious.<sup>79</sup> It was not until November 1938, at a Protestant event in Madison Square Garden, that he spoke for the first time publicly again about German anti-Semitism and the common prophetic heritage of Jews and Christians. The attack on the

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<sup>77</sup> My translation of Tillich: Preface, in: *GW II*: "Die Tatsache, daß der Nationalsozialismus die religiös-sozialistische Bewegung, wie die vielen anderen schöpferischen Ansätze der zwanziger Jahre zertreten, in den Untergrund oder ins Exil gezwungen hat, konnte nicht die Ausbreitung dieser Ideen in Kirchen und Kulturen jenseits der Grenzen von Deutschland und Europa hindern."

<sup>78</sup> Cp. Newport and Patterson: *loc. cit.*, p. 224.

<sup>79</sup> Cp. Pauck and Pauck: *loc. cit.*, p. 178.

God of Judaism would also be an attack on the God of Christianity. The fight against National Socialism must therefore be a life-and-death struggle without any alternative.<sup>80</sup>

In 1940, he was appointed as a tenured professor at Union Theological Seminary, and in the same year he also obtained American citizenship. As a new American citizen, he would have had the opportunity to become more involved in (American) politics. However, he did not do so, but instead advised all other immigrants as well not to get involved, as he was persuaded that one had to adapt to the American mainstream and should not even give the impression of being a sectarian group within American society. Hence, Tillich found his role as a critical analyst rather than a political activist. Only in the Council for a Democratic Germany, in which German expats discussed how to deal with the Germans after the surrender, he was an active member from early 1944 until its dissolution in September 1945. In it, he argued primarily that the Allies should allow the Germans to establish their own democratic government, an idea for which he was severely criticized (among others, by President Franklin Roosevelt). The failure of the Council and the severe criticism of his idea of a new and free democratic Germany, perceived as too mild, further induced him to refrain from any further domestic involvement.<sup>81</sup>

Between 1942 and 1945, however, he wrote more than 100 short speeches for the Office of War Information, which were broadcasted in German over shortwave from England on the Voice of America. In those, he not only expressed his contempt for the Nazi regime and criticized the persecutions of Jews as cruel, but also praised Roosevelt's New Deal and related social policies. Toward the end of the war, his appeals to the Germans to capitulate became more urgent; the time of a new *kairos* and a new order had come for Tillich, just as it had after World War I with the November Revolution.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Cp. Newport and Patterson: *loc. cit.*, pp. 39 et seq.

<sup>81</sup> Cp. Pauck and Pauck: *loc. cit.*, pp. 200-205.

<sup>82</sup> Cp. Pauck and Pauck: *loc. cit.*, pp. 198 et seq.

Shaken by the real conditions of the post-war period – Tillich considered the peace in Europe to be fragile and assumed already early on that there would be a third world war between East and West – he noted in frustration in 1948 that the productive time of the new *kairos* had passed unused. From then on, Tillich buried the idea that religious Socialism could ever become reality and instead threw himself into depth psychology as well as into the preparation of his Systematic Theology.<sup>83</sup> The concrete-political *socialist decision* became the apolitical *courage to be* – or also much more critical: "The anxiety and meaninglessness of the upper and middle classes became the point of departure instead of the oppression of the under classes."<sup>84</sup> Tillich himself was well aware of this shift in his work, which can be seen in his discussion of the *sacred void* that the new and unused *kairos* had left behind. However, instead of once again prophetically evoking the right moment, as in *The Socialist Decision*, in his post-war work he administered as sacred void only the last prophetic remnants he saw in the church and in society. He ought never again to see the *kairos* as having come.<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusion

I tried to systematically outline in part one of my thesis Tillich's thoughts and ideas about religious Socialism. I spent a lot of time with *The Socialist Decision*, which is, in my mind, his most important writing about religious Socialism and probably also the most radical one in his oeuvre. Moreover, it will remain Tillich's most developed theopolitical book, since he – as described – did not draft a new concrete-prophetic and constructive program for the time of a new *kairos* after the second World War. Even if Tillich ought never again to see the *kairos* as having come, contemporary theologians have been influenced by the Socialist Tillich in their

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<sup>83</sup> Cp. Pauck and Pauck: *loc. cit.* p. 206.

<sup>84</sup> Newport and Patterson: *loc. cit.* p. 60.

<sup>85</sup> Cp. Newport and Patterson: *loc. cit.*, pp. 60 et seq.

thinking and scholarship as I will show in the second part of my thesis. Some of them might have been influenced by Tillich or developed similar thoughts without even knowing about Tillich's religious-socialist work and activism.

Concluding the first part of my thesis, however, I would like to reiterate in the following the aspects of Tillich's work that seem in my mind important for today's theopolitical struggles: On the one hand, Tillich makes it clear that there can be no distinct line between the political and the theological. Albeit, for him this does not mean that the two coincide, but that political deeds must follow from every theology, no matter how abstract. He clearly rejects theologians (such as Barth), who see the church as apolitical and claim that they can preach the gospel in a non-political way. On the other hand, Tillich clearly separates himself in *The Socialist Decision* from those theologians who want to help with their theology a certain political party or certain politicians to achieve a breakthrough. The fact that his concept of religious Socialism is deliberately vague and broad may be interpreted as a shortcoming on Tillich's end because of the wide scope for reading his thoughts (as one can see in the discussion with Hirsch). At the same time, his vague conceptualization of religious Socialism is also a great strength. For thus the term religious Socialism does not become a principle that combines political and theological analysis and is merely something for supporters of left-wing politics, but a term that turns political and theological certainties upside down: The political protest of the proletariat is placed by Tillich in the prophetic tradition of theology, while the future of the Protestant principle (of theological protest) can only be found in the decision for Socialism.<sup>86</sup> I will talk about this more extensively in the second part of my thesis.

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<sup>86</sup> Cp. Russel Re Manning (Ed.): *Retrieving the radical Tillich. His legacy and contemporary importance*, New York 2015, p.5.

Tillich's self-confident and daring step to postulate the influence of theology not only on religion, but also on culture, is generally celebrated in theology as groundbreaking, since it breaks open the subject-object dualism to that which absolutely concerns us. However, the fact that in doing so he just as radically extended the influence of theology to the sphere of politics should not be underestimated but should finally be acknowledged by Tillich scholars as a landmark in the understanding of his person and his oeuvre as a whole instead. Religious Socialism belongs to Tillich and his work as much as the theology of culture; radicalism as much as sober analysis. I would therefore like to conclude this part of my thesis provocatively with a quote from Tillich expert and philosopher of religion Russel Re Manning: "The Real Tillich Is the Radical Tillich".<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Manning: *loc. cit.*, p. 1.

# Part Two – Paul Tillich and the Kairos of the Present Moment

## Introduction

I introduced in the conclusion of the previous part of my thesis a term that will become crucial for the second: *Theopolitics*. I have encountered the term *theopolitics* for the first time while reading Samuel Brody's book about Martin Buber.<sup>88</sup> My definition of *theopolitics* is, however, the following: There can be no distinct line between the political and the theological; the political protest of the proletariat must be placed in the prophetic tradition of theology, while the future of the Protestant principle (of theological protest) can be found in Socialism.

I should acknowledge right away that this is a definition of *theopolitics*, which came to my mind after an intense study of Tillich and after reading Manning's interpretation of Tillich. Therefore, the second part of my thesis is primarily concerned with the question whether this definition of theopolitics really is as groundbreaking as stated in the conclusion of the previous part of my thesis and whether Tillich's religious-socialist ideas that circle around the *kairos* are still useful for contemporary theology. Whereby I will try to find – as my thesis title states – a connection between Paul Tillich, the *kairos*, and the present moment.

An important approach thereby is the expansion of the proletariat and the breakdown of the two-class schema already expressed in *The Socialist Decision*, which can no longer be maintained in this way in the Neoliberal postmodern era. Moreover, religious Socialism is for Tillich not a time- or spaceless project; he always talks about his own historical situation. Therefore, it is important to bring his thoughts in conversation with our contemporary

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<sup>88</sup> Cp. Samuel Brody: *Martin Buber's Theopolitics*, Indiana 2018. I am quite sure that Tillich would have liked the term theopolitics for his and Buber's understanding of Theology. At least he was influenced by Buber, as his engagement with Buber's concept of the I and Thou in *The Socialist Decision* indicates.

theopolitical struggles for social justice. The loud demand for social justice, as it is expressed again and again by contemporary theologians in various forms, will be placed in the tradition of religious Socialism and thus made radically fruitful.

Since I had to limit my scope, I decided to concentrate on the three most prolific, progressive, and influential theopolitical developments in contemporary theology: I shall start with Revolutionary Christianity, as represented by Cornel West. After that, I am going to turn to Black Liberation Theology, as represented by James Cone. Finally, I shall engage with Womanist Theology, as represented by Katie Cannon. Additionally, I would like to say a word or two about the social gospel, since I compare Tillich as a European representative of religious Socialism to developments in contemporary North American theology while neglecting that the United States has its very own progressive movement that has greatly influenced the theopolitical developments throughout the world. Moreover, out of the social gospel emerged such important modern figures as Dorothy Day or Martin Luther King. Concluding the second part, I am going to argue that Tillich's thoughts on religious Socialism still seem to be useful for contemporary theology.

### **Revolutionary Christianity – Cornel West**

Cornel West is, similar to Tillich, influenced by Marxism in his thinking while critiquing Marx for his reductionism in regard to culture and religion. West and Tillich have a strong sense for the power of resistance that remains dormant in both and waits for its liberation. Unlike Tillich, however, West has recognized that the Marxist critique of capitalist society reduces all forms of injustice to the fact of economic alienation and is not interested in developing tools for a critical analysis and dismantling of the various forms of racism and sexism in our society.<sup>89</sup> Economic justice equals not automatically racial and gender justice; sadly, Marx and early

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<sup>89</sup> Cp. Mark David Wood: *Cornel West and the Politics of Prophetic Pragmatism*, Urbana et al. 2000, pp. 22 et seq.

Marxist shortcomings in this regard made it easy for a whole generation of Marx-influenced thinkers to overlook their own bias in regard to race and gender. Tillich is thereby no exception, which also those who venerate him have to acknowledge, even if the publication of the autobiographical reflections by Paul Tillich's wife Hannah on his sexism might have been shocking for many at first.<sup>90</sup>

Interestingly enough, if this would be a thesis about the late Tillich and the progressive and prophetic elements in his theology of culture, developed while experiencing the benefits of capitalism and American liberalism firsthand, I could proceed with an analysis of West left-liberal idea of prophetic pragmatism, starting with *The American evasion of philosophy*<sup>91</sup> and move forward to more recent works of him. While West's scholarship and activism belongs definitely to "the best of left-liberal progressive politics,"<sup>92</sup> I agree with Mark Wood that

prophetic pragmatism, one of the most fully elaborated and progressive expressions of post-Marxist politics in the present era, [...] poses no serious threat to the ruling economic class [as] it seeks to implement a reform agenda that attempts to address the needs of both rulers and ruled by establishing cross-class alliances on the grounds of a shared moral, parental, or national identity [and] seeks to solve human problems without challenging the moral legitimacy and social consequences of privatized control of production and planning of societal development.<sup>93</sup>

Hence, I decided to proceed with an extremely selective reading of West that only focuses on two of his early texts as they bear the most promising articulations of a revolutionary, prophetic, and progressive *theopolitics*: *Prophesy Deliverance*<sup>94</sup> and *Prophetic Fragments*.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Cp. Hannah Tillich: *From Time to Time*, New York 1973.

<sup>91</sup> Cp. Cornel West: *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, Wisconsin 1989.

<sup>92</sup> Wood: *loc. cit.*, pp. 184.

<sup>93</sup> Wood: *loc. cit.* pp. 185 et seq.

<sup>94</sup> Cp. Cornel West: *Prophesy Deliverance. An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, Philadelphia 1982.

<sup>95</sup> Cp. Cornel West: *Prophetic Fragments*, Michigan et al. 1988.

As West states right in the beginning of *Prophesy Deliverance*, his outline of revolutionary Christianity draws on the African American experience.<sup>96</sup> It would therefore be pointless to make an argument for whether West has been influenced by Tillich or not. In the following, I will rather show similarities and developments of thoughts that one can already find in Tillich's socialist oeuvre.

According to West, prophetic Christianity does not only preach salvation in the afterlife but emphasizes moreover the importance of struggling for liberation already today. As he outlines, human beings have to work for change of the giving conditions in this world, even if they will never be able to transform the given conditions entirely because of their own imperfection and ambiguity. For West, to take human beings as they are with all their power to transform and all of their contradictions, is the essence of the Christian gospel and has to be taken seriously. Prophetic Christianity would do so by deviating from it the "*Christian principle of the self-realization of individuality within community*" that works according to a "*dialectic of imperfect products and transformative practice*."<sup>97</sup>

This dialectics is thereby based on two fundamental norms: On the one hand, on democracy, as it is the way in which imperfect individuals can participate in transforming their communities, as long as political leaders stay accountable for their actions and every individual in a society helps to realize the moral core of the gospel within the democratic process. On the other hand, on freedom, as it is a gift of divine grace that is existential since it promises to liberate the human being from illness, death, and despair and simultaneously social since it practically works for the social liberation of humanity.<sup>98</sup>

For Tillich, freedom is also existential, in the sense that it liberates the human being from its bound to existential conditions like death and pain along with material conditions.

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<sup>96</sup> Cp. West: *Prophesy Deliverance*, p. 11.

<sup>97</sup> West: *loc. cit.*, pp. 16 et seq.

<sup>98</sup> Cp. West: *loc. cit.*, pp. 16-19.

Furthermore, freedom is for him also social, because in freedom the demand for an unconditionally new world is realized. Since human beings are not free yet, they are in a state of eschatological anticipation, which might be best described as a constant flux of hope and disappointment, utopia and compromise. Eschatological anticipation carries, similar to West's dialectics, the potential for a prophetic movement that emerges out of it. However, as discussed, Tillich stays utterly vague in his portrayal of the prophetic movement that has to emerge. Notwithstanding the fact that it should be a prophetic socialist movement emerging out of the larger proletariat. This movement should moreover be grounded in sharp and critical analysis, have a clear and prophetic expectation for the future, and demand and promise concrete action like an active struggle against oppression and exploitation.<sup>99</sup>

In opposition to Tillich, West's outline of a prophetic movement, one might call it revolutionary Christianity, is concrete and draws on a whole tradition of experience (African American) rather than on single historic events (like the revolution in Germany 1918 or the seizure of power of the Nazis 1933). He is able to transform the African American humanist tradition to a Christian revolutionary *theopolitics* "guided by the norms of individuality and democracy as proposed by the prophetic Christian viewpoint, promoted by the progressive Marxist orientation, and promulgated by revolutionary activity."<sup>100</sup> I will not be able to discuss West's argument in detail in this thesis, but would like to mention at least the four elements revolutionary Christianity has to systematically address: "the philosophical methodology of dialectical historicism, the theological world view of prophetic Christianity, the cultural outlook of Afro-American humanism, and the social theory and political praxis of progressive Marxism."<sup>101</sup> Rather than giving a systematic outline of revolutionary prophetic Christianity, I

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<sup>99</sup> Cp. pp. 21 et seq. of this thesis.

<sup>100</sup> West: *loc. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

would like to examine in the following some of West's thoughts in *Prophetic Fragments* that seem important to me for a new prophetic movement.

First of all, whereas Tillich sees apparently no benefits for a prophetic movement in the institution church any longer, which makes sense if one considers all the negative experiences he had with the German Lutheran churches and their officials, West needs the Christian church to put the prophetic movement forward. However, only a church that has rooted out its profound idolatries can do so – a claim Tillich would most certainly agree on.

Secondly, West still finds fruitful aspects for a prophetic movement in the *Christian* tradition itself, while Tillich is more interested in distilling elements out of the Christian and Jewish prophetic tradition that provide helpful for his abstract idea of *religious* Socialism. For West, "Christianity, at its best, possesses a unique capacity to highlight critical, historical, and universal consciousness principally owing to its vigilante critical disposition toward existing realities, its processive view of life and history, and its all-inclusive moral outlook."<sup>102</sup> The Christian tradition would thereby provide the resources a prophetic and revolutionary movement needs: critical consciousness, the empowering gospel of Christ, and a deep moral foundation that lays in the Christian identification with the oppressed.<sup>103</sup>

My third and last point about West's thoughts in *Prophetic Fragments* is that he underlines the importance of prophets. Tillich, facing the prophet of doom Adolf Hitler, seems to forget that a movement, which is supposed to be prophetic, needs also prophets who lead it. However, not self-appointed *Führer* or TV evangelists with their anti-intellectualism and their flagrant hypocrisy but prophets that are *organic intellectuals*<sup>104</sup> with the ability of a deep social analysis. Moreover, as West emphasizes, their prophetic critique must draw on the best

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<sup>102</sup> West: *Prophetic Fragments*, p. 120.

<sup>103</sup> Cp. West: *loc. cit.*, pp. 119-123.

<sup>104</sup> West uses Antonio Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals, according to which intellectuals are organic to their social group insofar as they emerge out of it and help to organize it (cp. Antonio Gramsci: *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, New York 1971, pp. 12 et seq.).

modernity and secularism has to offer, like tolerance and fallibilism, while dismantling secularist and modern idolatry in regard to wealth, technology, and science. About two of such prophets that West mentions, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King, I am going to talk more later on in my thesis.<sup>105</sup>

West's outline of Christianity is indeed revolutionary, radically democratic, and prophetic. In opposition to Tillich, who is justifiably ashamed of the Christian tradition of his fellow white European brothers and refuses to place his socialist *theopolitics* in their washed-out liberalism while desperately trying to carry on to a positive anthropology and theology instead of ceasing the field to Barth and his depressingly negative word of God theology, West build's up upon a tradition that is prophetic, revolutionary, and faithful in essence: The African American experience.

### **Black Liberation Theology – James Cone**

While West is often seen as the one who made the African American experience radical by placing it in the tradition of Marxist revolutionism, it was James Cone who "severed the Gordian knot"<sup>106</sup> that tied Black Christians to the theology and theological methods of the white church in the first place. He did so by outlining a Black theology of liberation that assigns the gospel of Christ to the suffering of the Black community.

Cone emphasizes in his work *A Black Theology of Liberation* that every theology is contextualized and that one has to take into account its specific perspective while doing theology.<sup>107</sup> Due to the fact that God liberates the oppressed from "death-dealing political,

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<sup>105</sup> Cp. West: *loc. cit.*, pp. ix et seq.

<sup>106</sup> Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone: *Black theology. A documentary history*, 1st edition, New York 1979, p. 78.

<sup>107</sup> Cp. James Cone: *A Black Theology of Liberation. Fortieth Anniversary Edition*, New York 2010, p. xv.

economic, and social structures of society"<sup>108</sup> – a fact that becomes clear reading the biblical revelation – for theologians in North America the point of departure has to be the oppression of Black people. However, no white theologian has yet taken the oppression of the Black community (theologically) seriously or the contextualization of their own theology. Hence, it is the task of Black theology to denounce the white evil, to search for the Black God, and to center the liberation of the oppressed. Consequently, God has to be Black, since God is not impartial but takes sides. Moreover, God cannot be for the Black community and for the oppressors at the same time.<sup>109</sup> A way of thinking that has also implications on how Black theology is looking to history and anthropology: Black history is the source for the theological understanding of the liberating work of God and Jesus is understood as a human being that radically sides with the oppressed and puts them in the center.<sup>110</sup>

Cone emphasizes further that, insomuch as Black theology has to deal with the liberating work of God, the Black church has to support the Black community in gaining Black power. An idea that stands – as Cone explains – in contradiction to the white church, which hinders Black people to gain power. Therefore, the central concern of the Black church should be to embrace the Black power revolution as the work of Christ and the work of the freedom giving spirit of God within the Black community.<sup>111</sup> Cone summarizes in his essay *Black Theology and Black Liberation* the relation between Black power and Black theology quite well:

Black power focuses on the political, social and economic condition of black people, seeking to define concretely the meaning of black self-determination in a society that has placed definite limits on black humanity. Black theology puts black identity into a theological context, showing that black power is not *consistent* with the gospel of Jesus Christ: it *is* the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Cone: *loc. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>109</sup> Cp. Cone: *loc. cit.*, pp. 6-9.

<sup>110</sup> Cp. Cone: *loc. cit.*, p. 20; p. 28; p. 91.

<sup>111</sup> Cp. James Cone: *The White Church and Black Power*, in: Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone: *Black theology. A documentary history*, 2nd revised edition, New York 1993, pp. 66-84.

<sup>112</sup> James Cone: *Black Theology and Black Liberation*, in: Wilmore and Cone: *loc. cit.*, p. 106.

I hope that with this brief summary of Cone and his work for a Black Theology of Liberation it gets clear that Marxism and thinkers that have been influenced by Marx, like West and Tillich, do not have a monopoly on radicalism. The dream to remake society is internal to Black faith and Cone aimed for its illumination.<sup>113</sup> Albeit, Cone was in his writings definitely much more aware of the limitations of radicalism than the early Tillich or West:

In a culture which rewards 'patriots' and punishes 'dissenters,' it is difficult to be prophetic and easy to perform one's duties in the light of the objectives as a whole. [...] It is always much easier to point to the good amid the evil as a means of rationalizing one's failures to call into question the evil itself. It is easier to identify with the oppressor as he throws sops to the poor than to align oneself with the problems of the poor as he endures oppression. Moreover, the moral and religious implications of any act of risk are always insufficiently cloudy to make it impossible to be certain of right action. Because man is finite, he can never reach that state of security in which he is free of anxiety when he makes moral decisions. This allows the irresponsible religious man to grasp a false kind of religious and political security by equating law and order with Christian morality.<sup>114</sup>

Similar to Tillich, who places in his *theopolitics* the political protest of the proletariat against their oppression in the prophetic tradition of theology, Cone places the political protest of Black people in the United States against their oppression in the prophetic tradition of Black faith and experience. Both relate their theologies to real life-and-death issues, which makes them *theopolitics* instead of mere theological God-talk in the first place.

Like Tillich, Cone is utterly disappointed from the institution church as it is closely connected to the bankruptcy of white theology and lacks real life relevance. It failed to perform its function, namely, to work for the oppressed. Only a church that makes sure that its own theology is (still) relevant to the problems we face today, is for Cone a meaningful and relevant institution. One might say with Tillich's words, only a church that makes sure that it does not miss the time and does not lack the theological words for decisive action, also known as the *kairos*, is an appropriate institution for the problems we face today, like capitalism and deep-

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<sup>113</sup> Cp. Matthew Harris and Tyler Davis: 'In the Hope That They Can Make Their Own Future.' *James H. Cone and the Third World*, *Journal of Africana Religions*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2019, pp. 189–212, here p. 199.

<sup>114</sup> Wilmore and Cone: *loc. cit.*, p. 126.

rooted racism. Either that or one has to cling to Barth and his negative theology, which however relates theology to life in a way that has not much to do with the issues we face right now (capitalism, racism, sexism, etc.).<sup>115</sup>

Corresponding to West's *theopolitics* of Revolutionary Christianity, Cone's Black Liberationist *theopolitics* relies as well strongly on the African American experience and (faith) tradition. Cone nevertheless demonstrates much starker than West how much radicalism and power rests in Christianity as a prophetic movement of the oppressed. His language is concrete and demands decisive action, where Tillich stays blurry and West too much focused on Marxist social analysis instead of revolutionary practice.

The task nonetheless is to incorporate the critical analysis of capitalist society that we find in West into Cone's argument about Black oppression and to explore the intersections between oppressed groups, which we find in Tillich's expansion of the proletariat, without disregarding the fact that the power of Cones argument results out of the experience and tradition of one particular oppressed group: African Americans.<sup>116</sup>

### **Womanist Theology: Katie Cannon**

Influenced by Schelling, Tillich emphasized in his dissertation from 1914 that ethics is an integral part of theological thinking. Moreover, he stressed that theory and practice have to go together<sup>117</sup> – a thought that he revised later on in his *Autobiographical Sketch*: “I never doubted [...] that I was destined to a life devoted to intellectual rather than practical matters.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Cp. Wilmore and Cone: *loc. cit.*, p. 127-130.

<sup>116</sup> In his later works, Cone acknowledges the intersectionality between class, gender, and race and incorporates some intersections (like race and gender, or race and class) in his argument. However, he does not do so systematically and does not use the analytical toolbox of critical social analysis.

<sup>117</sup> Cp. Paul Tillich: *Mystik und Schuldbewusstsein in Schellings philosophischer Entwicklung*, in: Renate Albrecht (ed.): *Gesammelte Werke Band I* (hereinafter cited as GW I), Stuttgart 1959, pp. 11-108, here pp. 70 et seq.

<sup>118</sup> Paul Tillich: *On the Boundary. An Autobiographical Sketch*, New York 1966, p. 30.

Due to the fact that his thoughts about ethics are as diverse and contradictory as his ideas about theory and practice, I would like to recapitulate briefly Tillich's thoughts on ethics in his early writings about religious Socialism. In *Grundlinien des religiösen Sozialismus*, he outlines a teleological ethics in which theonomy becomes the objective of religious Socialism: the unity of sacred form and sacred content in a concrete historical situation, creating a sacred and at the same time just reality.<sup>119</sup> As described in *Das System der Wissenschaften nach Gegenständen und Methoden*,<sup>120</sup> published 1923, this means more concretely to render the essence of Christian ethics – love and charity – into a passionate critique of society. In *The Socialist Decision*, Tillich basically designates religious Socialism as the movement for which Christian ethics understood in this way is normative.<sup>121</sup>

Sadly, Tillich desperately tried to integrate the practical philosophies of the thinkers of his time (like Schelling) in his ethics instead of recognizing the fractures between his idea of religious Socialism and the dominant moral principles of his time.<sup>122</sup> One more time, Tillich hides behind the abstract instead of sticking to the concrete. His socialist ethics claims to hold theory and praxis together but loses the practical in the abstract. Arriving in the United States, “Tillich's anti-ethical idealism gave him an excuse to change the subject after he fled to a capitalist colossus lacking a socialist tradition.”<sup>123</sup> Anything ethical that was left got buried by

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<sup>119</sup> Cp. p. 6 of this thesis.

<sup>120</sup> Cp. Paul Tillich: *Das System der Wissenschaften nach Gegenständen und Methoden*, in: Renate Albrecht (ed.): *GW I*, pp. 109-294. I have not mentioned this work of Tillich in the first part of my thesis, as Tillich does not really talk about Socialism in it but rather constructs his very own phenomenology of spirit. In it, Tillich assigns ethics a kind of mediator function between religion and socialism while critically examining the thoughts of Edmund Husserl.

<sup>121</sup> For a more systematic and extensive discussion of the significance of ethics in the early (and late) works of Tillich see: Matthias Neugebauer: *Die Ethik-Konzeption Paul Tillichs. Eine Annäherung mit Rücksicht auf das Gesamtwerk*, in: Christian Danz et. al.: *International Yearbook for Tillich Research*, Berlin et. al. 2015, pp. 103-142.

<sup>122</sup> Unfortunately, no one has yet taken up the task to show all the fractures between Tillich's outline of religious Socialism, his ethics, and his defense of Enlightenment-style practical philosophy. Nevertheless, the biggest fracture might run between theory and praxis as demonstrated.

<sup>123</sup> Dorrien: *Social Democracy in the Making*, p. 18.

the late Tillich within his existential ontology. If Tillich had, at some point, incidentally attended a lecture by his student Theodor Adorno in Frankfurt in the 1960s, he could have learned that ethics must become political philosophy, the question of the right life must merge into the question of the right politics.<sup>124</sup>

While Tillich still heavily relies on the practical philosophies that were *en vogue* at his time (Kant, Schelling, Husserl, etc.), modern *theopolitics* – in particular in the United States – critically interact with the dominant ethical approaches on which most European theologians that identify as liberals trust on. One example for a theologian, who develops ethics in a critical engagement with dominant Western ethics, is Katie Cannon. She critiques in *Black Womanist Ethics*<sup>125</sup> that Western ethics would silence Black contributions and postulate Black inferiority.

Cannon's archetype is Protestant virtue ethics: Virtue ethics would on the one hand connect ethical qualities to economic success. She describes how it urges persons to always be assiduous and moderate — in particular when dealing with goods or money — promising that the result is (economic) success. These values are according to Cannon only white values as racism and white male capitalist oligarchy prevent the equal distribution of economic and political power, which makes the "virtuous" promise of success worthless for Black people. On the other hand, virtue ethics would presuppose the freedom of each person to make ethical choices. Since white supremacy and male superiority are the driving forces of society, the ethical norm and the code of conduct are also defined from a white male perspective oppressing other voices and therefore restricting freedom itself. The consequence is that Black people are forced to the bottom of the social, political, and economic hierarchy making Black existence dependent and controlled.

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<sup>124</sup> Theodor Adorno: *Probleme der Moralphilosophie 1963*, Frankfurt am Main 2010, p. 262.

<sup>125</sup> Katie Cannon: *Black Womanist Ethics*, Atlanta 1988.

Cannon suggests in contrast to dominant ethics to extrapolate a Black womanist ethics from the cultivated values and virtues of the Black community. Doing so, she emphasizes the moral wisdom that particularly Black women show in their contexts and cultural circumstances. Cannon describes furthermore that moral wisdom gets orally passed as collection of moral counsel from one generation to the next, while stating that it can also be found in written form in Black (women) literature. The tradition of Black literature would not only parallel Black history but convey the whole Black oral tradition. Both are consequently Cannon's primary sources for moral reasoning. Zora Neale Hurston, Howard Thurman, and Martin Luther King Jr. function thereby as her examples par excellence.<sup>126</sup>

Taking seriously the theological tradition of the Black Church means that Black women can enhance their experimental moral wisdom. [...] Black women intellectuals must transform the tradition so as to enable Black women, who celebrate Black life, to make a reaffirmation of their spiritual roots. [...] Black women today must embrace the formal features of the theological ethics of Thurman and King because they provide moral resources for the great struggle that *still lies ahead*.<sup>127</sup>

I agree with Cannon that Western virtue ethics and progressive *theopolitics* do not go well together, even if I think that the Aristotelian notion of  $\pi\rho\alpha\acute{\alpha}\zeta\iota\varsigma$  is still meaningful for modern ethics. Martha Nussbaum and others have shown that for a democratic society the (Aristotelian) practice of common values is extremely important. Children, for example, are not born knowing democratic values but have to practice them through education.<sup>128</sup>

Moreover, as Cannon stresses, the field of ethics and practical philosophy has to be diversified in order to enhance moral wisdom. Modern *theopolitics* have an ethical obligation to look for marginalized prophetic voices, like the voices of African American men *and* women, and to include them in the theological, political, and ethical protest against capitalism, racism,

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<sup>126</sup> Cp. Cannon: *Black Womanist Ethics*, pp. 1-9.

<sup>127</sup> Cannon: *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 174.

<sup>128</sup> Cp. Martha Nussbaum: *Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?*, in: *The Journal of Ethics*, 1999, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1999), pp. 163-201 for a nuanced critique of different concepts of virtue ethics and Martha Nussbaum: *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton 2010 for her argument about the importance of a virtuous education for democracy.

and sexism. Likewise, as Tillich rightly recognized, religious Socialism can as a such only be successful if it comes into realization as an inclusive movement that breaks down the two-class schema and acknowledges that the proletarian movement is not simply the socialist struggle of white male workers against their employers but has a lot of facets in the Neoliberal aera.

The task therefore is to develop a communal ethics that takes seriously particularities, like Cannon does, without falling prey to Neoliberal fragmentation. Ethics need today more than ever universal moral principles that govern our human cohabitation and our cohabitation with animals and nature. One example is the Kantian concept of humaneness independent of biological, sociological, or historical circumstances that has paved the way to universal human rights. As Kant postulated, human beings have dignity because they are free, but freedom is nothing other than independence from concrete facts. Since such independence can only be abstract, it is necessarily universal. However, Liberalists (including Tillich) mostly use Kant's abstract universalisms to cultivate an abstract universal ethics that is supposed to be objective and universal but does nevertheless not much else than being neutral towards economics, towards politics, and towards the suffering of marginalized communities while replacing Kant's universal humaneness with "objective" categories like nationality or Christianity.

Modern *theopolitics* has to diversify not only the field of ethics by taking seriously particularities and marginalized voices but has moreover to start a discussion which universalisms belong abolished (e.g., textualism in jurisprudence) and which universalisms have to be reclaimed from Liberalism (e.g., showing that Kant's concept of humaneness means to radically change politics and economics in a way that the dignity of every human being is assured).<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Cp. for this progressive reading of Kant New School Professor and Kant scholar Omri Boehm. Unfortunately, he has expressed this reading of Kant only in German and US newspaper contributions until now: "Can Refugees Have Human Rights?", New York Times opinion page, October 19<sup>th</sup> 2015: <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/10/19/could-refugees-have-human-rights/> and (in German) "Immanuel Kant. Sie wollen ihn stürzen sehen", Zeit Online, November 26<sup>th</sup> 2020: <https://www.zeit.de/2020/49/immanuel-kant-rassismus-philosophie-aufklaerung-identitaetspolitik-cancel-culture>. Both links were last retrieved on 03/18/21.

## Religious Socialism and the Social Gospel

I concentrated in this thesis on Tillich and chose not to cover different streams of the European tradition of religious Socialism (nor am I able to do so in regard to the social gospel). Next, I am going to outline the main similarities and differences between both traditions and proceed then to Martin Luther King Jr. and Dorothy Day as modern figures that can be placed in the social gospel tradition.

First of all, religious Socialism and the social gospel are both movements rather than doctrines of faith and aim for a social and ethical understanding of Christianity. Secondly, both seek to transform the current structures of the societies we live in into more just forms of cohabitation. Thirdly, they are equally rooted in a liberationist reading of the Bible.<sup>130</sup> Finally, even if the social gospelers did not identify as Socialists, nearly all of them supported socialist ideas like economic democracy and producer cooperatives.<sup>131</sup> However, whereas the religious Socialists in Europe – like Tillich – were representing only one minor theological movement among others, “the social gospel was an evangelical earthquake that should be called the Third Great Awakening. It proclaimed that America had fallen into miserable corruption and only a spiritual awakening would save America from its sins.”<sup>132</sup>

While not covering the different streams of the social gospel in greater detail, there is a fundamental racial disparity within the movement that has to be addressed. On the one hand, there is the Black social gospel tradition, which is closely linked to the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King emerged out of this tradition.

The social gospel that arose in black churches was a struggle for a new abolitionism. It arose as a response to the abandonment of Reconstruction and an upsurge of racial terrorism. The black social gospel enlisted the churches in the struggle for racial justice,

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<sup>130</sup> Cp. Gary Dorrien: *The New Abolition. W. E. B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel*, New Haven 2018, pp. 3 et seq.

<sup>131</sup> Cp. Gary Dorrien: *The Social Gospel in Black and White, Then and Now*, Canopy Forum, July 20<sup>th</sup> 2020. <https://canopyforum.org/2020/07/20/the-social-gospel-in-black-and-white-then-and-now/>. Last retrieved on 03/18/21.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

helping to build protest organizations against racism and racial violence. It paved the way to the civil rights movement, the greatest story we have in this country, providing the social justice theology of the civil rights movement.<sup>133</sup>

On the other hand, there is the white social gospel tradition, out of which Dorothy Day emerged.

The white social gospel put social justice on the agenda of the ecumenical churches, changing how these churches talked about salvation. It created the ecumenical movement and the field of social ethics. It recovered the social justice emphasis of Hebrew scripture and the centrality of the Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus. It was the greatest wave of social justice activism ever generated by the ecumenical churches, and it was a species of Christian socialism.<sup>134</sup>

### **Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel**

It would not do much justice to Martin Luther King's work as a theologian and civil rights activist to pin him down to only one theological tradition. As Cornel West demonstrates, it is more important to identify the prophetic sources that have shaped him intellectually: Black church Christianity, liberal Christianity, Gandhian nonviolence, and American civic religion.<sup>135</sup>

Gary Dorrien accurately outlines why these four sources are critical in order to understand King.

King heard the gospel and committed himself to it in the only institution owned by black Americans. His training in liberal Christianity provided intellectual and social ethical ballast for his religious faith. His commitment to Gandhian resistance provided a method for his racial justice activism and an extra-Christian language for the way of nonviolence. His belief in the U.S. American ideals of democracy, freedom, and equality enabled him to call the nation to fulfill these ideals.<sup>136</sup>

Black church Christianity functions thereby as King's most important prophetic source since his socialization as "a child of the black church"<sup>137</sup> provided him with a unique black Christian perspective for his work as an activist and theologian. Moreover, he successfully managed to

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Cp. West: *Prophetic Fragments*, p. 4.

<sup>136</sup> Gary Dorrien: *Breaking White Supremacy. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel*, New Haven 2018, pp. 21 et seq.

<sup>137</sup> West: *Ibid.*

assign novel causes to black church Christianity by criticizing that the white churches sold out Christian ethical principles.<sup>138</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that one cannot pin King down to only one theological tradition, it is important to stress King's affiliation to the black social gospel as it stimulated the civil rights movements and helped its breakthrough in the 1950s. Moreover, King's way of doing theology might be best described as a form of what James Cone later on defined as Black liberation theology.<sup>139</sup> King can consequently be seen as one of the many intellectuals in the tradition of the black social gospel "who heard the prophetic gospel in the black church, appropriated social gospel criticism, engaged the Gandhian revolution, and called America to stop betraying its vaunted ideals of democracy, freedom, and equality."<sup>140</sup> The (black) social gospel tradition was meaningful and inspiring for King as "it was inherently social, it held fast to the gospel belief in salvation, and it was unabashedly political, a call to transform the structures of society in the direction of social justice."<sup>141</sup>

King realized, however, that it was risky to talk about Socialism or Social Democracy in Black middle-class congregations. His support of Socialism stayed therefore an open secret<sup>142</sup> while forming a wide-ranging protest movement that was wide-ranging exactly because King succeeded in building bridges "between black and white church communities, between middle-class blacks and white liberals, between black nationalists and black conservatives, between church communities and the academy, and, above all, between the northern and southern civil rights movements."<sup>143</sup> He moreover "became a global icon by

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<sup>138</sup> Cp. West: *loc. cit.*, pp. 5-7 and Dorrien: *loc. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>139</sup> Cp. Dorrien: *Breaking White Supremacy*, pp. 1 et seq. and p. 17.

<sup>140</sup> Dorrien: *The Social Gospel in Black and White, Then and Now*.

<sup>141</sup> Dorrien: *loc. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>142</sup> Cp. Dorrien: *loc. cit.*, pp. 443 et seq.

<sup>143</sup> Dorrien: *loc. cit.*, p. 18.

assailing his country's racial prejudice, condemning its economic injustice, opposing its war in Vietnam, standing with the poor and oppressed, expounding a vision of liberation, and being assassinated for doing so."<sup>144</sup> In which way might King still inspire today's theopolitics? West seems to have a good sense for how one might assess the status and legacy of King today.

The unique status and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., is that as a black Baptist minister, he embodied the best of American Christianity; as an organic intellectual, he exemplifies the best of the life of the mind involved in public affairs; as a proponent of nonviolent resistance he holds out the slim hope for social sanity in a violence-ridden world; as an American prophet he commands the respect even of those who opposed him; and as an egalitarian internationalist he inspires all oppressed people around the world who struggle for democracy, freedom, and equality.<sup>145</sup>

I agree with Cornel West that Martin Luther King represents the best Christianity in America has to offer.<sup>146</sup> He shows what is possible if a progressive and prophetic heritage, like the African American (social gospel) tradition, becomes embraced by charismatic leaders that function simultaneously as prophets and organic intellectuals. Moreover, he embodies the significance of broad coalition building and non-violent protest and activism. Lastly, King's inclusive and concrete speeches and writings, in which he concisely denounced the racism of white people and outlined his dream of a better world for people of color, inspired and still inspires people of all colors to face racism and to work for a better world.

While it is an impossible and useless undertaking to compare King to Tillich, King paradigmatically shows which impact Tillich could have had returning to Germany after the second World War, preparing for a new *kairos*, and starting a new attempt to build an inclusive and broad religious socialist movement. Moreover, what a powerful German organic intellectual of revolutionary and prophetic Christianity he might have become and how useful

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<sup>144</sup> Dorrien: *loc. cit.*, p. 1

<sup>145</sup> West: *Prophetic Fragments*, p. 12.

<sup>146</sup> Cp. Cornel West: *The Religious Foundations of the Thought of Martin Luther King Jr.*, in: Peter Albert and Ronald Hoffman (eds.): *We Shall Overcome. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Freedom Struggle*, New York 1990, p. 129.

he might have been as a representative for the left wing of the Social Democratic Party. Unfortunately, this will forever stay a bold and unfulfilled utopia which neglects that Tillich has always been an intellectual first and activist second.

Nevertheless, just seeing which great influence and impact Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer had when they decided to return to Germany to rebuild the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, that quickly became the most significant think tank for the young Federal Republic of Germany, let's me think whether Tillich's legacy of a theology of culture and depth psychology was really worth it to stay in the United States or if it would not have been more productive, at least for post-War Germany, to have a religious Socialist aligned with the *Frankfurt school* that would have brought critical theory and progressive theology together.

### **Dorothy Day and the White Social Gospel**

Dorothy Day might well be described as "the most influential lay person in the history of American Catholicism."<sup>147</sup> She can be seen as part of the social gospel, like King, not so much for continuing the theological legacy of Walter Rauschenbusch and others but for continuing the social activism of the social gospelers.

Next to her political activism, in particular her commitment to pacifism, she will be remembered as the cofounder of the Catholic Worker movement, which consists out of more than hundred autonomous communities today that provide shelters and food for the poor and homeless. Moreover, the progressive anti-war monthly *The Catholic Worker*, founded by Day, still reaches more than 25.000 subscribers today.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Patricia Lefevere: *The rumble in Dorothy Day's soul still quakes 40 years after her death*, NCR Online, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020. <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/rumble-dorothy-days-soul-still-quakes-40-years-after-her-death?fbclid=IwAR2g1z9Z8nWTCG8QbLSprRhXMEpCZoC5II-pG3mPMYq6FBgQ07Gth8iaEcY> Last retrieved on 04/07/21.

<sup>148</sup> Cp. John Loughery and Blythe Randolph: *Dorothy Day. Dissenting Voice of the American Century*, New York 2020, p. 5 and pp. 410-13.

Many pages could be filled outlining the political protests she participated in, analyzing her theopolitical writings, or recounting just how much she dedicated her life to the objectives of the Catholic Worker movement. However, I will concentrate on one specific aspect of her work that seems from particular relevance for this thesis: localist politics. For Day, the needs and concerns of the persons that approached the shelters of the Catholic Workers or lived nearby had always priority to (inter)national political issues, because localism was *Christ's technique*. He stayed with the people around him, often outsiders, instead of church officials or state authorities. This was still not an easy approach for Day as she had to mediate between the political activist and the Christian communitarian in herself.<sup>149</sup>

This kind of Christian localism meant for Day foremost to work “from the bottom and with the few”<sup>150</sup> but also influenced the social and political principles of the Catholic Workers: It is not only important that workers gain control over the means of production and that the assembly line is abolished, but factories need simultaneously to become decentralized. Additionally, as Day urges, the economic focus has to change to the agrarian sector and to the rural aspects instead of solely focusing on huge fabrics in even bigger cities.<sup>151</sup>

Day's emphasis on localism as *Christ's technique* is from utter importance for modern theopolitics as it functions as a reminder that the particularities of distinctive communities and the voices of the marginalized have not only to be taken seriously for the development of a new theory of theopolitics, as shown in the part about Katie Cannon,<sup>152</sup> but as well in theopolitical praxis. To build a broad coalition that includes all communities of the oppressed, poor, and marginalized means that one has to personally interact with these communities.

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<sup>149</sup> Robert Coles: *Dorothy Day. A Radical Devotion*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1989, pp. 89 et seq.

<sup>150</sup> Dorothy Day: *The Long Loneliness*, New York 1952, p. 221.

<sup>151</sup> Cp. Day: *loc. cit.*, pp. 220 et seq.

<sup>152</sup> Cp. pp. 38-42 of this thesis.

This is not an easy task but rather, as Day describes it, a constant work from the bottom: It means to leave one's own comfort zone by meeting and living with those who are marginalized and oppressed in our local communities, to sympathize with their suffering, and to listen to their needs while trying to help within one's own limitations. As the example of the Catholic Worker movement shows, this can be a frustrating task as one invests a lot of energy in helping a few while dreaming from real political change for the many. Nevertheless, next to building broad theopolitical coalitions and protest movements, theopolitics has to take the praxis of solidarity with those who are (spatially) close to us seriously as an end in itself and not only as a part of a political agenda as noble as it might be.

Keeping the tradition of the social gospel alive consequently means, as the examples of King and Day show, to shape Christian communities that take the preferential option for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized seriously and actively work within particular communities for liberation of sexism, racism, and the current neoliberal socio-economic conditions. Doing so, it seems the better way to leave the doctrinal discussions of the past behind and to develop theopolitics that is inclusive for people of all gender, sexualities, colors, and denominations.<sup>153</sup>

Lived solidarity with the wounded and dying in the first World War and with the striking workers during the revolution 1918 helped Tillich to understand why conservative Prussian protestant theology needed to be abolished and why it was time to develop a new and progressive theopolitics of religious Socialism. He however went on with the flow of the entire Weimar left-wing intelligentsia that felt quite comfortable behind the walls of their universities and behind the covers of their books, while ignoring that the real struggle was happening on the streets between right wing combats groups and peaceful protesters, who would have needed solidarity and support. This might well be another reason why Tillich failed to produce more than a contourless and utopian social order as counter concept to suffering and oppression.

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<sup>153</sup> Cp. Darryl Trimiew: *The Social Gospel Movement and the Question of Race*, in: Christopher Evans (ed.): *The Social Gospel Today*, Louisville 2001, pp. 27-37, here pp. 36 et seq.

## Conclusion

In the second part of this thesis, it became clear that many of Tillich's thoughts on religious Socialism still seem to be useful for contemporary theology. However, they need to be perceived in the context of Tillich's time and made fruitful for modern theopolitics. Moreover, it is important to point out the many flaws in Tillich's thoughts and not to apprehend his concept of religious Socialism as closed system. Nevertheless, even if I only had the chance to bring Tillich's thoughts into conversation with a handful of progressive modern American thinkers, I hope that it got clear that there are many elements of Tillich's engagement with religious Socialism that can be critically used for or already been discovered in modern theopolitics.

Navigating through all of this progressive theopolitics shows that the *kairos* is very much present in the moment: In Cornel West's outline of a revolutionary, radically democratic, and prophetic Christianity that draws on African American experience; in the dream to remake society, internal to Black faith and illumined by James Cone; in the marginalized prophetic voices, like the voices of African American men *and* women, uncovered by Katie Cannon. Furthermore, in Martin Luther King Jr. as a sincere prophet and organic intellectual of American Christianity and in Dorothy Day as a powerful Christian social activist on behalf of the poor and oppressed.

Whereas Tillich did not see a new *kairos* after the Second World War, modern theopolitics is very adept to place the political protest of the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed in the prophetic tradition of theology recognizing that the time for decisive action, i.e., the *kairos*, is very much present in the moment. Moreover, all mentioned progressive modern theologians seem to have very much a sense for the fact that the future of the theological protest can be found in the work for democratic Socialism – as Tillich had already argued for 1933 in *The Socialist Decision*. Although some progressive theologians (e.g., Cannon, West, and Day) discuss it more explicit than others (e.g., King and Cone).

## General Conclusion – Why Religious Socialism matters

As much as politics and economics are no isolated spheres, theology will stay limited and meaningless if it does not take up the struggle for social and economic democracy. Like Adorno, who postulated that ethics must ask for the right politics (one might add: and for the right economy!), the same is valid for the discipline of theology. We need to leave our comfort zone of theology as mere God talk behind us and have to develop theopolitics by combining the most progressive ideas the disciplines of theology, ethics, philosophy, economics, and politics have to offer, in order to nurture radical solidarity movements that struggle for social justice despite their fragile prospects of success and despite promises of the welfare state.

Religious Socialism in the tradition of Tillich but refined by the most progressive modern (American) theopolitics is – at least in my mind – the best theoretical and practical basis for a radical solidarity movement that finds its spiritual groundwork in Christianity and in the prophetic sources of the Jewish-Christian tradition. Following Ernst Bloch's concept of a cold and warm stream of Marxism,<sup>154</sup> I would suggest that religious Socialism provides on the one hand a cold stream that includes sharp Marxist critique of commodity fetishism and neo-Marxist coalition building between oppressed groups. Whereby it is important to place all oppressed groups in the proletarian struggle while taking their differences seriously and using a new and inclusive definition of proletariat. On the other hand, religious Socialism provides a warm stream that includes the powerful prophetic condemnation of racism, sexism, exploitation, and oppression while outlining a prophetic utopia that the solidarity movement anticipates.<sup>155</sup> To conclude, religious Socialism still matters wherever it combines the best thoughts progressive theologians and philosophers of religion have to offer for the *kairos* of the present moment.

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<sup>154</sup> Cp. Ernst Bloch: *Principle of Hope, Volume I*, Cambridge 1995, p. 208.

<sup>155</sup> Cp. Gary Dorrien: *In a Post-Hegelian Spirit. Philosophical Theology As Idealistic Discontent*, Waco (Texas) 2020, pp. 320; 333; 337.

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