

Paul Tillich on History and Socialism

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ABSTRACT

Paul Tillich believes that the sacred and human history undergo a parallel development, which is ‘punctuated’ from time to time by the ‘breaking’ of the former within the latter during moments of special significance, *kairoi*; these become “centers” of human history. Such a ‘center’ must not be comprehended either in terms of quantity, or as a midpoint between past and future, or as a particular moment, but as something that makes coherent the manifestation of the Kingdom of God within the human collective existence. One of the understandings the German Theologian has concerning human history is that it is a succession of such ‘centers’. This is an ‘evolutionary’ view within the history of ideas, and a topic I dealt with in my work.

Keywords: Centers of History, History of Salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*), *Kairos*, Paul Tillich, Revelation, Socialism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is divided into two parts: the first introduces Tillich’s view on the relationship between the sacred and human history in terms of *kairos/ kairoi* –moment(s) of fulfilment or achievements of particular significance. The second part deals with his conception of socialism as a *kairos* and presents the manner in which this Theologian and Philosopher portrays himself as a socialist.

The connection with Prof. McGrath’s work consists in the fact that both thinkers have an ‘evolutionary’ approach to human condition as it relates to salvation. We shall see how Tillich conceives this link.

II. TILlich STAND ON THE HISTORY OF SALVATION AND ON HUMAN HISTORY

For Paul Tillich (1886-1965) world history is a reality where the Kingdom of God manifests itself. In order to present his opinion on human (political) history, we have to start from his view on the Spiritual Presence and its manifestations within Christianity, the religion this Theologian practiced. It means that we have to begin from what he considers to be the “history of salvation” (*Heilsgeschichte*). In the chapter “The Kingdom of God within history”, the third volume of his book *Systematic Theology* (Tillich, 1963), Tillich distinguishes between the history of salvation and what he calls the history of revelation (human history; i.e. history as the result of human creativity). He thinks that the difference people make between the two is only methodological since “[t]he history of revelation and the history of salvation are the same history. Revelation can be received only in the presence of salvation, and salvation can occur only within a correlation of revelation” (Tillich, 1951, p. 144). Therefore, they are two aspects of the same reality: as soon as one experiences revelation, one also experiences salvation. “[N]o one can receive revelation except through the divine Spirit and (...) if someone is grasped by the divine Spirit, the centre of his personality is transformed; he has received saving power” (Tillich, 1951, p. 146, in *his American spelling*). In order to receive revelation one has to be prepared – once the preparation is complete the salvation begins. When discussing this, Tillich reminds the readers that Moses had to “remove his shoes before he can walk on the holy ground of the revelatory situation” (Tillich, 1951, p. 144). He posits that the history of salvation ‘breaks’ into the world history and because of that the former can be seen as a part of universal history. Therefore, the history of salvation can be referred to in terms of definite space, measured time, and historical causality. The Theologian asserts that, nevertheless, differences exist between the history of salvation and the world history, and that the case is so not only because “world history involves many ambiguities”, but because of a complexity of reasons. One of them is the following:

(...)although it [history of salvation] is within history, it manifests something which is not from history. For this reason the history of salvation has also been called sacred history. It is sacred and secular in the same series of events. In it history shows its self-transcending character, its striving toward ultimate fulfillment (Tillich, 1963, p. 363).

The human history is always a combination of objective and subjective elements. In so far as the human being can “transcend the given situation, leaving the real for the sake of the possible” and “sets and pursues purposes” (Tillich, 1963, p. 303) he/she is free. Tillich believes that caught between destiny and freedom, one can produce something new. However, for him ‘historical’ activity does not contribute to what happens within the heavenly kingdom, and he argues the idea thus:

History is valued merely as an important element in man’s earthly life; it is a finite texture within which the individual must make decisions relevant to his own salvation, but irrelevant for the Kingdom of God above history. (Tillich, 1963, p. 397)

I personally think that he is not right on this point, but what he says further makes sense. Tillich conceives human history to be a succession of ‘centers’ or *kairoi*; those represent moments of special significance for humankind and occur when the sacred history ‘breaks’ into the mundane world. Such a center of human history must be understood neither in terms of quantity, nor as a midpoint between past and future, nor as a particular moment, but as something that makes coherent the manifestation of the Kingdom of God within the human collective existence. The Theologian flags out that if someone makes an analogy between human history and the history of salvation the question arises “how can Christianity justify its claim to be simultaneously rooted in time and based on the universal center of the manifestations of the Kingdom of God in history?” (Tillich, 1963, p. 367). To this Tillich’s first response is as follows: the assertion of Christians that they are experiencing a universal event, which is at the same time the ‘centre’ of their history (the coming into the world of Jesus of Nazareth as Christ) is an expression of the daring courage of the Christian faith. The faithful assert their belief that the central event of their existence is the point of reference for all other revelatory happenings. The Theologian states that: “Faith has the courage to dare this extraordinary assertion, and it takes the risk of error” (Tillich, 1963, p. 364). His second response is that only Christianity’s central event can offer satisfactory solutions to the ambiguities that characterize the history of the world; no other religion or system of thought is built around something of the same magnitude.

Tillich insists that it must be emphasized again and again that in Christianity the center has already appeared:

(...)church history has one quality which no other history has: since it relates itself in all its periods and appearances to the central manifestation of the Kingdom of God in history, it has in itself the ultimate criterion against itself - the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. The presence of this criterion elevates the churches above any other religious group, not because they are “better” than others, but because they have a better criterion against themselves and, implicitly, against other groups (Tillich, 1963, p. 381).

But he also knows that Christianity, with its doctrine that Jesus’ advent is the ‘center’ of its history, cannot overlook that other interpretations of human history claim the same ‘status’ for events peculiar to them. For the followers of each religion the moment of its foundation is the center of history – *kairos*. Therefore, such a ‘center’ is mentioned by Muslims, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, and Manichaeists. Concerning those, Tillich believes that the events upon which they are centered do not have a universal character. It means for him that the human history does not receive a universally valid center through the appearance of the prophet Mohammed, nor is Buddha a dividing line between past and future because the embodiment of the Spirit of Illumination can happen at any time and not only at a moment of fulfillment. He also thinks that for the Jews the next ‘center’ is the end of history.

In order to avoid any confusion within Christianity between the history of salvation (with its paradox of the ultimate appearance in history) and supernaturalism (which could disconnect the world history from the history of salvation), Tillich calls the former the Kingdom of God. And he wants to know if there is a pattern to the manifestations of this sacred realm within human history. The answer to such a question is culturally determined; this is the conclusion the Theologian reaches. It means that the response is decided by the theological system in which a religious group has the revelatory experience of perceiving and receiving the center of history. Tillich avers: “The metaphor ‘center’ expresses a moment in history for which everything before and after is both preparation and reception. As such it is both criterion and source of the saving power (...)” (Tillich, 1963, p. 364). One can infer from this text that the centers of history do not appear according to a regular pattern but only when “the time is fulfilled.” A group –as well as a person– can discern when time reaches such a point because in that moment people are ‘grasped’ by the Spiritual Presence.

For Tillich human history is self-transcendent and is not only a dynamic movement onward oriented but, as we have observed, also “a structured whole in which one point is the centre” (Tillich ST III: 366). But if such a central point exist, what is the beginning and the end of the movement of which this point is the center? The German Theologian asks himself:

When did that movement start of which the Christ’s appearance is the center, and when will it come to an end? The answer, of course, cannot be given in terms of numbers (...) Beginning and end in relation to the center of history can mean only the beginning and end of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in history (...) (Tillich, 1963, p. 366).

The response to the above question is determined by the character of the center itself, which means that a history which is one of revelation and salvation begins when humankind become aware of the ultimate question about its fragile condition, and of its destiny to overcome it. The end of their history comes when humans cease to ask the question about their state. In other words, the answer to it will be fully given when humanity become universally at one with its essence. This situation refers to a “post-temporal” state of existence and consciousness. Tillich says:

More specifically, it [the theological problem of eschatology] symbolizes the “transition” from the temporal to the eternal, and this is a metaphor similar to that of the transition from the eternal to the temporal in the doctrine of creation, from essence to existence in the doctrine of fall, and from existence to essence in the doctrine of salvation (Tillich, 1963, p. 395, emphasis added).

The Theologian believes that the question of the end of history and of the universe has rarely been raised, and when that happened, it was not seriously answered despite the fact that the threat of man’s self-annihilation and the historical tragedies of the twentieth century have led to a “passionate concern for the eschatological problem”; (Tillich, 1963, p. 396). A serious engagement with these issues is still to come; I state this because, as we know, today, in the twenty first century, tragedies still happen and wars still take place. Tillich supposes that the end can happen in one of the following three ways: physical extinction due to cosmic or human causes; biological or psychological transformation which would annihilate the dimension of the spirit; and any inner deterioration which deprives humans of their liberty, and, consequently, of the possibility of having a history. Nevertheless, despite his eschatological concerns, in discussing history Tillich does not excessively concentrates on its beginning and end, but rather accentuates the idea of a cycle within human and cosmic development. He says: “History again becomes a circle of circles in which human suffering and divine grace contend with one another, but nothing fundamentally new happens” (Tillich, 1977, p. 103). That might be so for someone who considers, as Tillich does, that the eventual return of humanity to its original essence from which it was estranged through the fall, is a part of the above-mentioned process, and not a novelty. But I take this standpoint further, and affirm that the repetition of each cycle brings something new. Tillich himself, as we can notice when he speaks about the maturing of the humankind implies this; there are a few contradictions within his work, some of them due to his intellectual evolution. We shall speak now about how the Theologian sees the issue of human history as a maturing process.

A. Human History as a Maturing Process

For Tillich, political history is a continuous process which humankind undergoes towards the perception of a *kairos* by peoples. He says that it is one of great importance and justifies his conviction thus:

We spoke of the moment at which history, in terms of a concrete situation, had matured to the point of being able to receive the breakthrough of the central manifestation of the Kingdom of God. The New Testament has called this moment the “fulfillment of time,” in Greek, kairos [...] Its original meaning – the right time, the time in which something can be done – must be contrasted with chronos, measured time or clock time. The former is qualitative, the latter quantitative. In the English word “timing” something of the qualitative character of time is expressed, and if one would speak of God’s “timing” in his providential activity, this term would come near to the meaning of kairos(...) (Tillich, 1963, p. 369).

This interpretation opposes relativism, as well as any progressivist position about human history. For, according to Tillich, the historical progress which we perceive is determined by the Kingdom of God (i.e. it exists because the Kingdom of God breaks through human history). This interpretation of the human history implies that we cannot speak about progress beyond what is the center of this history; however, he adds “with the exception of the domains of reality where progress is essential”. For the Theologian, therefore, the appearance of the center is not dependent upon the contribution of humans and is not the result of progress as it is usually understood. However, for him, the history which prepares revelation and salvation seems to be the progressive factor that governs the movement of humankind from immaturity to maturity. In order for humankind to perceive a *kairos* as it is – as something that gives meaning to history – this development is necessary. Each moment of history is at the same time a moment of preparing for and one of receiving this saving power. According to Tillich the culmination of the human maturing process is Christianity because it is based on the appearance of Christ as the final manifestation of the Kingdom of God and as the fulfillment of time, as was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. Christ’s appearance happened once in the “original revelatory and saving stretch of history” (Tillich, 1963, p. 365), but it happens again every time one admits that time is fulfilled. Humankind’s maturing process does not stop with the appearance of its ‘center’, i. e. the appearance of Jesus as Christ. Jesus is trans-temporal; because he is present in any period of time Tillich says that “mankind is never left alone. The Spiritual Presence acts upon it in every moment and breaks into it in some great moments, which are historical *kairoi*” (Tillich, 1957, p.140). In order to recognize this fulfillment of time, the *kairos*, as noticed, one must be grasped by the Spiritual Presence; that because it makes him/her open to perceive, receive, and accept the “signs of the times”. Tillich states that “Awareness of a *kairos* is a matter of vision” (1963, p. 370). Jesus knew that his

enemies did not see these signs, and urged them to try to grasp them by opening themselves towards the Spiritual Presence: “*Kairos* always appears when temporal forms are in need of transformation, and an eternal meaning is imminent, waiting to break through in temporal fulfillment” (Tillich, 1971, p. 55). An individual grasped by the Spiritual Presence is enabled to discern between the great *kairos* and the subsequent *kairoi*.

With respect to nations, the same is the case. Israel leaving Egypt, the foundation of the city of Rome, the revolutionary war in America, and the ‘meeting’ of East and West in contemporary Japan are mentioned by Tillich as *kairoi* within the process of humankind’s maturation. These *kairoi* in political history are particular centres of history. A national ‘center’ of interpretation of each political history exists: it is the moment when the vocational conscience of a nation appears. The advance toward it has been the core of Western culture’s dynamics over the past five hundred years. The relation between *kairos* and *kairoi* is the relation between the criterion and that which stands under the criterion. The movement of history is determined by the combination of the great *kairos*, which is unique, and the *kairoi*, which occur wherever an individual or a group is possessed by the Spiritual Presence. The “great *kairos*” is experienced repeatedly through multiple *kairoi*. Tillich affirms: “*Kairoi* are rare, and the great *kairos* is unique, but together they determine the dynamics of history in its self-transcendence”; (Tillich, 1963, p. 372).

A very interesting idea Tillich introduces is that the ‘maturation’ of humankind means not only its ability to receive the central manifestation of the Kingdom of God, but also the power to resist it (Tillich, 1963, p. 370). He further elaborates that such a level of “maturity” is attained through the internalization of the Old Testament’s Law, which happens through education. For one who takes for granted what one received through education in such a framework, anything that comes to break the Law is questioned, if not automatically rejected. But Christianity “completes” Judaism by adopting and living this set of prescriptions.

Tillich treats a particular *kairos*, socialism, in great detail. He was himself a socialist, and for me personally a socialist priest was a big surprise after growing up in a society that considered that there is opposition between such a doctrinal system and religion. I present further some of Tillich’s thoughts on it and the political regime it generated.

III. TILlich ON SOCIALISM

In a letter to Tillich sent in 1936, Adolf Lowe, his friend and co-member in “Kairos Circle,” a small organization initiated by a group of Christian intellectuals,¹ wonders about what the explanations for the failure of socialists’ projects might have been: “Where do the reasons for our failure lie? Does the lack of success bear witness against our ends, against our means, or against both? Too many answers to these questions are making the round among our friends for us to be certain which is the true one...”. Because Tillich wrote about moments of fulfilment in human history, *kairoi* – he considered socialism to be one of them – Lowe thought that he would have an answer to this issue.

After the First World War the term *kairos* was largely used with respect to the religious socialist movement in Germany, expressing the feelings of many people in Central Europe that a new stage of human history had begun, bringing a new conception about it and about life: “This term [*kairos*] has been frequently used since we introduced it into theological and philosophical discussion in connection with the religious socialist movement in Germany after the First World War” (Tillich, 1963, p. 369). Here is how Tillich explains his interpretation of the term *kairos* in particular political contexts; he applied it to politics even earlier, immediately after the Russian revolution of 1917. This is what he states:

It was then when I first used the New Testament concept of kairos, the fullness of time, which as a boundary concept between religion and socialism, has been the hallmark of German religious socialism. The concept of the fullness of time indicates that a struggle for a new social order cannot lead to the kind of fulfillment expressed by the idea of the Kingdom of God, but that at a particular time particular tasks are demanded, as one particular aspect of the Kingdom of God becomes a demand and an expectation for us. The Kingdom of God will always remain transcendent, but it appears as a judgment on a given form of society and as a norm for a coming one. Thus, the decision to be a religious socialist may be the decision for the Kingdom of God, even though the socialist society is infinitely distant from the Kingdom of God (Tillich, 1966, pp. 78-79).

With the fate of socialism in mind, the Theologian makes a parallel between it and the reality about which Jesus said that is “at hand.” He refers to the biblical story in which this phrase is used asserting that the belief in socialism was expressed at times by the “prophetic eschatological symbol of the ‘kingdom of God’”; (Tillich, 1977, p. XX).

¹ Other members of the group included Günther Dehn, Car Mennicke, Adolf Löwe, and Alexander Rüstow (see Weidner, 2020).

John R. Stumme, the author of *Introduction to The Socialist Decision*, assesses Tillich's conception of socialism:

One might even say that the theological thrust of his religious socialism was to discover the concrete social and political meaning of the prayer "Thy kingdom come". The kingdom comes in history, yet remains transcendent, the kingdom is "at hand", but it cannot be possessed. Its character is paradoxical: the transcendent is not in an undialectical opposition to history, but shows its genuine transcendence by breaking into history, shattering and changing it (Tillich, 1977, p. XX).

Tillich openly expresses his credo, the socialist option. In his volume "My Search for Absolutes" he declares:

I was in sympathy with the social side of the revolution even before 1918, that side that soon was killed by the interference of the victors, by the weakness of the socialists and their need to use the Army against the communists; also by inflation and the return of all reactionary powers in the middle of Twenties. My sympathy for the social problems of the German revolution has roots in my early childhood which are hard to trace (Tillich, 1967, p. 39).

He describes religious socialism explaining that, in his opinion, it "stands fundamentally on the ground of Marx's analyses of capitalistic society"; (Tillich 1971, p. 48). Tillich calls the capitalistic system "demonic" (p. 50). He further elaborates in *Religious Socialism*:

In the struggle against a demonized society and for a meaningful society, religious socialism discerns a necessary expression for the expectation of the Kingdom of God. It regards this unity of the socialist dialectic, a unity of expectation and demand of that which is to come, as a conceptual unity and at the same time as a concrete and contemporary transformation of the Christian eschatological tension (Tillich, 1971, p. 50).

Within a pamphlet published in 1919 with Carl Richard Wegener, another theoretician of the socialist movement, Tillich urges "the representatives of Christianity and the church who stand on the socialist soil to enter into the socialist movement in order to pave the way for a future union of Christianity and the socialist social order" (Tillich & Wegener, as cited in Tillich, 1977, p. XII). He expressed his conviction that the emergence of socialist ideology is the beginning of a new age, in which the opposition between socialism and religion shall be replaced by a new synthesis of economic justice that is to include the awareness of the presence of the divine in everything that is human. Focusing on this replacement, Tillich was preoccupied to find the essential roots of socialism and Christianity in order to contribute to both these systems of thoughts. He affirms that the origins of any political thinking can be found within human existence itself and within its political consciousness. With regard to the latter, he affirms that the fundament of both conservatism and political 'romanticism' is "the consciousness of being dependent on the origin". Opposing them, socialism fundamentally dissolves the bond of origin. "*The breaking of the myth of origin by the unconditioned demand is the root of liberal, democratic, and socialist thought in politics*" (Tillich, 1977, p. 5, emphasis in original). A romantic note is evident throughout Tillich's *oeuvre* (as it is throughout that of young Marx); this is in connection to his aspiration for a time when "individual and species will become one". Rejecting the manner in which those who called themselves socialists applied Marx's ideas, and at the same time confronting the reality that socialism has a number of inherent conflicts, Tillich believes that to resolve the latter one should read Marx's early philosophical texts because the solution to them is there.

Concerning the discipline of Theology within the ideological landscape, the German thinker emphasizes that its role is to defer any political ideology to the arbitration of the Kingdom of God. This means to submit to it not only the bourgeois and Nazi conceptions, but first of all socialism itself. From this it could be inferred that Tillich did not have an absolute commitment to socialism, but actually he had with respect to a particular version of it: the "genuine" socialism he believed exists in Marx's works. He fought all his life to see it practiced. The Theologian affirms that socialism cannot linger in dogmatic resignation or become utopic. He intended "*to extricate Marxism from the dogmatic narrowness into which it has fallen among the epigones, and to restore it to the breadth it had in the [works of] young Marx*" (Tillich, 1977, p. 125, emphasis in original). This idea is emphasized by Jean Richard, who has published Tillich's complete works into French. Richard affirms that "The dogma itself implies a hidden philosophy. Tillich exposes this hidden philosophy qualifying it as 'economism' and contrasting it to the 'real humanism' of Marx" (Tillich 1994, p. LXXV, author's translation). Tillich describes in more detail his relation with Marx as follows:

It has always been dialectical, combining a Yes and a No. The Yes was based on the prophetic, humanistic, and realistic elements in Marx's passionate style and profound thought, the No on the calculating, materialistic, and resentful elements in Marx's analysis, polemics, and propaganda. If one makes Marx responsible for everything done by Stalin and the system for which he stands, an unambiguous No against Marx is the necessary consequence. If one considers the transformation of the social situation in many countries, the growth of a definite self-consciousness in the industrial masses, the awakening of a social conscience in the Christian churches, the universal application of the economic-social method of analysis to the history of thought – all this under the influence of Marx – then the No must be balanced by a Yes (Tillich, 1967, pp. 40-41).

This “Yes” in favor of Marx’s ideas is obvious in Tillich’s entire political theology; indeed the socialism he believes in resembles the one initially Marx put forward.

Tillich formulates the “socialist principle” by opposing it to the “bourgeois principle”. The latter is qualified by him as being in ignorance of the complexity of reality because it propagates the notion of an “automatic harmony” in which humans and things are equally controlled through rationality. According to such a conception people are cut off from the creative origins of life because the bond of origin is broken in this process. Tillich cautions that the “bourgeois principle” manifests itself even among socialists. This is the reason why, when encouraging people to become Socialists, he urges them to adopt the original socialism, which he sees as being the basis for Germany’s civilized future. The book *The Socialist Decision* was written in 1932 and at that time Tillich claimed that this country was supposed to choose for its future between “barbarism” and a new interpretation of the initial socialism. Germany chose “barbarism”, yet Tillich continued to believe in socialism as being the self-expression of the proletariat because in a meaningless world it gives meaning to life. This meaning is, ultimately, religious. Socialism is for the proletariat what the Kingdom of God is for the believer. Both are based on the notion of expectation, but Tillich distinguishes religious socialism from utopianism “by the fact that its goal is individually creative, born concretely in history” (Tillich, 1971, p. 63). He writes in the chapter “Religious Socialism” within the book *Political Expectation* that:

For the proletarian situation [...] the shattering of the meaning of life in the vital dimension amounts to the shattering of the meaning of life in general. [...] In this view religious socialism represents the original intention of the Old and the New Testaments (Tillich, 1971, p. 46).

In the context of that discussion, Tillich formulates three elements of socialism that are linked to religion. These are: “the power of the origin, the shattering of the belief in harmony, and an emphasis of the demand” (Tillich, 1977, pp. 100-101). Socialism combines the three elements in the notion of expectation. “These three elements are interrelated in such a manner that when the presupposition of the bourgeois principle is affirmed, the bond of origin in the sense of political romanticism is broken, and when the bourgeois belief in harmony is rejected, room is made for the powers of origin” (Tillich, 1971, p. 101). Therefore, the socialist movement as a coherent system of thought and action in which a quest for justice is pursued, should be understood to represent at the same time the bond of origins (expressed in the form of patriarchal religion), the breaking of it by the unconditional demand, and also its fulfillment in a promised future (as opposed to a present characterized by ‘harmony’). Thus, it becomes obvious to me that for Tillich Socialism and the Kingdom of God as notions have a large area or overlapping in the way they deal with eschatology. The German Theologian openly declares that the socialist principle is prophetic: “Socialism is prophetism on the soil of an autonomous, self-sufficient world” (Tillich, 1977, p. 101). Therefore, it is more than a concept (which has a narrow meaning): it is a “symbol of expectation against the myth of origin and against the belief in harmony. It has elements of both, but it transcends both” (Tillich, 1977, p. 101, emphasis in original). From the point of view of the human subject, the proper response vis-à-vis Socialism is one of expectation; he/she adopts an attitude that looks toward the future as something promised and something demanded, as a gift and as a task to be carried out. In the chapter “Between Lutheranism and Socialism” within the volume *On the Boundary* Tillich writes:

Religious socialism should be understood as one such move toward a new theonomy. It is more than a new economic system. It is a comprehensive understanding of existence, the form of the theonomy demanded and expected by our present kairos (Tillich, 1966, p. 81).

Theonomy is for Tillich, “the relatedness of all cultural forms to the ultimate” (1967, p. 75) and “a protest against an ostensibly realistic and religiously indifferent culture” (1971, p. 45). In the context of the discussion about *kairos*, theonomy is defined as “the general goal of the creation of new forms out of the Kairos” (1971, p. 55). In other words, theonomy is the state of culture impregnated with the Spiritual Presence.

Theonomous periods are periods in which rational autonomy is preserved in law and knowledge, in community and art. Where there is theonomy nothing which is considered true and just is sacrificed. Theonomous periods do not feel split, but whole and centred. [...] Culture is not controlled from outside by the church, nor is it left alone so that the community of the New Being stands beside it. Culture receives its substance and integrating power from the community of the New Being, from its symbols and its life (Tillich, 1951, pp. 148-149).

A theonomous age is one in which morality, culture and religion coincide. For instance, the Middle Age in Europe is considered to be theonomous. In a culture like that the reason is united with its depth and the conflict between autonomous and heteronomous reason disappears. “Theonomy does not mean the acceptance of a divine law imposed on reason by a highest authority; it means autonomous reason united with its own depth” (Tillich, 1951, p. 85). Catholicism demands a new theonomy in accordance with the medieval idealized model. Protestantism is also searching for a new theonomy, being aware, in contrast with Catholicism, that “a new theonomy cannot be created intentionally by autonomous reason” because

“it is not a matter of intention and good will.” This is “a matter of historical destiny and grace” (Tillich, 1951, pp. 149-150).

It is important to emphasize that Paul Tillich puts himself in an opposing position vis-à-vis National Socialism. When his former friend, Emanuel Hirsch, wrote a book which brought philosophical and theological support to this ideology and joined the party of the “German Christians”, Tillich sent an open letter to him stating, among other things, “(...) you deform the prophetic and eschatological doctrine of *Kairos*, transforming it into a sacerdotal and sacramental consecration of a concrete event” (Tillich, 1994, p. 229, author’s translation, emphasis in original). This means that Tillich accused Hirsch of idolatry. By idolatry Tillich means a demonical distortion of the experience of *kairos* because, he asserts: “Two things must be said about *kairos*: first, they can be demonically distorted, and second, they can be erroneous. And this latter characteristic is always the case to a certain extent, even in the ‘great *kairos*’” (Tillich, 1963, p. 371). Probably the German Theologian thinks “erroneous” in this context to mean that the *kairos* and the great *kairos* are idolatrous if that through which the divine appears is identified with the divine itself. Idolatry occurs when the *kairos* is judged in terms of physical time, space, and causality. Therefore, it was idolatry that led Hirsch to become a partisan of Hitler’s “New Germany.” Tillich questions Hirsch:

(...) how can you say that, given that all the original and true questions you ask have already been asked years ago by people you call your most fierce adversaries, and that they answered these questions so well that you have nothing else to do than to rely on their answers in order to formulate yours? The elderly people see these things and nod. But the younger ones ignore everything about these issues. How can you give them such a false idea about evolution and take away any chance for them to understand the true evolution? (Tillich, 1994, p. 228, author’s translation).

The question is commented by David Hopper, one of the analysts of Tillich’s work, who stresses that: “Tillich warns that Hirsch must share responsibility for the crisis of despair that lies ahead for the German people if the visionary preachments of National Socialism go unchecked” (Hopper, 1968, p. 82). Tillich also accuses Hirsch for wanting to discredit Religious Socialism by referring to it in terms of “Religious Marxism” for Marxism was very unpopular at that time. In the open letter addressed to Hirsch, Tillich analyzes the philosophical-theological origins of Hirsch’s and (partially) his own ideas, in order to emphasize the difference between them. As Hopper shows:

He [Tillich] confesses astonishment at Hirsch’s use of many of the basic concepts of Religious Socialism in the cause of National Socialism and expresses concern that these concepts have not been identified as arising out of the Religious Socialism movement. He further charges that the manner in which Hirsch makes use of these ideas robs them of their deepest meaning [...] Tillich insists that the “demands of the political struggle” should not be allowed to override the discipline of truthful, critical analysis; he suggests that Hirsch, in the course of his book, has failed to display an independence of the critical, scholarly function from the present political situation (Hopper, 1968, p. 72).

Tillich knew that through Nazism, socialism degenerated into a false prophetism, because through nationalism and racism socialism becomes idolatry. It seems that Tillich was thinking, like Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), that any excessively strong determination, religious, ethnic or of any other nature (any ‘ism’) alters the original nature of *kairos*, often with dangerous effects in the practical, historical life. Tillich’s political theology prevented him from falling into idolatry, but did not prevent him from being shattered by seeing the suffering caused by the First World War, and the effects that National Socialism had in Germany.

While Tillich claims to repudiate “every kind of social Utopia” (Tillich, 1966, p. 75) one has to agree with Stumme that in his work there are many elements of such a notion. This statement must be understood in the sense that Tillich always thought that the humankind moves between Paradise, experienced during the Golden Age, and the Kingdom of God, which is still to come. Tillich describes the Paradise as a place where: “there is no separation from the ground of creation, from the creative ground, because the world and man are still united with the ground, not yet having broken away from it” (Tillich, 1971, p. 156). As mentioned, for him, the movement towards the Kingdom of God will reach its aim only in a post-existential time, i.e. when the humankind will regain its essence.

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