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Growing the NAPTS

Verna Marina Ehret

Greetings to the members of the NAPTS. The following is a summary of the Society's work at the last national meeting. First, Society President Ben Chicka has proposed once again to maintain the current leadership positions, from the executive committee to the board. We are still in the process of re-establishing our non-profit status with the state of Massachusetts. Rather than have to start over with bringing new leadership up to speed, this proposal allows the work to continue uninterrupted. The napts.org website is currently being maintained with limited functionality and dues is collected by check through a form on the website (and also included at the end of this *Bulletin*). Electronic payment can be set up once the non-profit status has been restored. This plan was approved at the business meeting in November, 2024. One change that will be coming is that Matthew Lon Weaver will be taking over as editor of the *Bulletin*, which would separate the editor and secretarial position. A proposal will go to the executive committee and board for Verna Ehret to remain secretary on the executive committee while Matthew Lon Weaver takes over as editor, and also be on the executive committee. This change will be addressed in a summer board meeting.

Ben Chicka also recommended a change in the bylaws to move the roles in the presidential line from a one year to a multi-year position. This change would provide greater stability in leadership, in particular as we work with the AAR after the elimination of the Tillich Group in the AAR. This change will be discussed and voted on in a summer board meeting. A P.O. box will be established to provide a distinct Society address for legal purposes and the establishment of a vendor relationship away from a private address. The executive committee is also looking to be incorporated in Delaware because residency is not required. Another option is associating the Society with an Institution as it was before, but that raises challenges when leadership changes. This issue will continue to be discussed in the summer board meeting (TBD). Given the dispersion of Society members globally, maintaining our non-profit status, vendor relationships, and bank accounts require stability within the continually moving leadership roles.

The next proposal was about the *Complete Works/Collected Works* project. Russell Re Manning is stepping back from editor of the overall project. The proposal brought to the business meeting was the creation of a couple of working groups. One will collect an official history of the project and its current state to have an archive of what the current direction is. A second group will look into the options moving forward, which would then be brought to the board for discussion. Charles Fox has agreed to take the lead, working with a small group of colleagues, in this endeavor. Taylor Thomas offered to assist. In the discussion of digitizing the project, Johanne Kristensen and J.J. Warren have also offered to assist given their current work with digital humanities.

In order to maintain institutional history and streamline the ability of each new board to find important documents for the Society, the executive committee is also working on collecting all organizational documents to keep in an electronic archive that is secure, but also accessible to all who will need access.

Finally, the treasurer report. As of November, the Society account had $1175, low but stable. In order for the society to do its work, in particular maintaining the website, working on the *Complete Works* projects, and running annual meetings, it is important members stay up to date on the membership dues. Unfortunately, at this time dues still need to be paid by check. The standard annual dues is $60. Information on how to pay your dues is available on the NAPTS website at, https://www.napts.org/pages/membership.html.

Note: Delays in the winter issue mean this spring issue will be a replacement for the fall/winter and will be separated from the summer issue.

The editor works to make sure everything that comes across their desk is included in the *Bulletin*, but please reach out if something you sent was not included or there is an error that needs to be corrected. Further, if you have presented recently at any Society meetings and have not published your paper with us, please send it to vehret@mercyhurst.edu or LonWeaver1509@gmail.com. Articles published in the *Bulletin* are not prevented from being published

in academic journals. If you have news of other publications or work, send that along as well.

The 2025 annual meeting of the NAPTS will be Friday, November 21st in Boston in conjunction with the annual American Academy of Religion meeting. Details will be forth coming in the next *Bulletin*, through the Google group, and on the website, www.napts.org

Articles

Loneliness and Solitude In Current Discussions and In Paul Tillich's Work

Ilona Nord

Introduction

In his dissertation on loneliness, published during the pandemic, media scholar Denis Newiak writes: "The question of loneliness is one of the most pressing issues in late modern societies: everyone feels it, and an increasing number of people suffer from it. It manifests in diverse forms, yet it often remains invisible and elusive. We fear it, yet we strangely long for it. The feeling of loneliness is as intrinsic to modernity as the metropolis with its anonymous glass skyscrapers and suburban neighborhoods, as our increasingly fast-paced lifestyle marked by relentless change, and as the omnipresent, escalating digital technologies that turn us into isolated extensions of ubiquitous screens."[1] The process of modernization continuously generates new and harsher forms of loneliness, as the modern promise of prosperity, security, and freedom comes only at the expense of the communities sacrificed to modern life. Those who reside in modern society cannot escape the omnipresence of loneliness.

While Newiak's argument is alarmist, the following perspective presents a strikingly opposite stance: In 2016, long before the pandemic reached out to us, Norwegian philosopher Lars Svendsen published his "Philosophy of Loneliness"[2]. Svendsen advocates for a capacity to be alone and raises questions such as whether there might be good and bad forms of loneliness or if humans perhaps experience the best moments of their lives when they are alone. He asserts that he has rarely worked on a topic that has caused him to question his own assumptions as profoundly as loneliness. These two distinct studies, one media-scientific, the other philosophical, engage with a social discourse on an existential issue, challenging readers to also consider a theological interpretation of loneliness. This will be explored through Paul Tillich's theology. First, however, empirical findings on the question of loneliness will be presented.

1. *Loneliness: Observations on a Widespread Social Condition and the Question of Whether It Is a Signature of Modernity*

In the United Kingdom, it was Jo Cox who first addressed the issue of loneliness as part of her government work in the mid-2010s. In 2018, this led to the establishment of a British ministerial department dedicated to combating loneliness in society. Following her tragic assassination, the country appointed a Minister for Loneliness, who, alongside responsibilities for sports and civil society, focuses on addressing loneliness.[3]

Since the pandemic, the phenomenon of loneliness and the discourse surrounding it have spread through society like a root network, affecting not only aging populations but also adolescents and young adults. A German study by the Bertelsmann Foundation, titled "How Lonely Are Young Adults in 2024?", reports the following findings: In a representative sample of 2,532 respondents, 46 percent of young people were moderately or severely lonely.[4] Furthermore, the "Einsamkeits-Barometer" of the German Federal Government provides additional insights through a longitudinal study on this topic.[5] Loneliness has consequences

[1] Denis Newiak, Die Einsamkeiten der Moderne. Eine Theorie der Modernisierung als Zeitalter der Vereinsamung (The Loneliness of Modernity. A Theory of Modernization as an Era of Isolation), Wiesbaden 2021, 17.

[2] Lars Svendsen, Philosophie der Einsamkeit. Wiesbaden 2016 (originally in norwegean language 2015)

[3] https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jo_Cox (last accessed October 21, 2024).

[4] file:///Users/iln03iy/Downloads/GenNow_Einsamkeit_Daten_06lay.pdf (last accessed October 21, 2024).

[5] https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/240528/5a00706c4e1d60528b4fed062e9debcc/einsamkeitsbarometer-2024-data.pdf (last accessed October 21, 2024).

for both the physical and mental health of individuals. People who experience loneliness are more likely to adopt extreme political views and are more inclined than non-lonely individuals to believe in political conspiracy theories. It is evident that certain groups tend to feel lonelier than others. These include women, individuals with a migration background, people who are unemployed, those with lower educational attainment, and individuals who are divorced or widowed. Notably, young adults, particularly those between the ages of 19 and 22, also feel both emotionally and socially isolated.

Sociological Insights

German sociologist and cultural theorist Andreas Reckwitz argues for a departure from the emotional framing of the topic and suggests starting with the more neutral concept of solitude: solitude is a state in which a subject is largely focused on themselves, independent of social interactions. This state inherently includes both possibilities: a positive experience of autonomy, characterized by the opportunity to withdraw into oneself without disruption by others, and the negative experience of loneliness, that is, the feeling of involuntary social isolation from others. In addition to this form of loneliness, Reckwitz posits that, in Western society since the 1980s, the societal conditions surrounding solitude have changed. Solitude is becoming increasingly illegitimate, while conversely, it is seen *2.* as a growing risk of social exclusion. Yet, solitude continues to represent a place of longing.[6] There might be the association that this place of solitude is related with positive feelings of being alone for me, a peaceful and pleasant situation.

Instead, forms of social interaction are expanding that can be interpreted, following Zygmunt Bauman, as manifestations of a "liquid modernity"[7]. These forms are more fluid and expansive, but their instability requires individuals to continuously invest in them actively. The division between the social front stage and backstage—between formal role performance and private retreat—is eroding. This erosion implies that, since there appears to be no "outside" to the social sphere, it becomes increasingly difficult to be alone in a socially acceptable way. Simultaneously, solitude appears riskier as individuals' self-worth becomes dependent on this fluid sociality, with a concrete threat of loneliness as social exclusion looming.[8]

In contemporary culture, two emblematic figures capture the misery of loneliness and the longing for solitude: the INCEL and the Disconnected. The INCEL, the male, heterosexual, involuntarily single individual who becomes embittered by his loneliness—sometimes even to the point of violent outburst—symbolizes the risk of social exclusion in late modernity. He is one of the societal "losers" within the society of singularities, highlighting the explosive potential of social isolation within it. In contrast, the temporarily Disconnected is characterized by Urs Stäheli's book "Soziologie der Entnetzung"[9]: Stäheli illustrates that the desire for disconnection is particularly strong among the well-connected. The Disconnected is an individual who skillfully navigates professional, private, and public networks but simultaneously yearns to withdraw, to leave behind the team and family, to engage in digital detox. Solitude is something the Disconnected must fight for. The challenge, therefore, lies in being temporarily alone without becoming permanently lonely.[10]

The Theme of Loneliness in the Context of Paul Tillich's Theology

Before delving into specific discussions of loneliness in Tillich's work, it is important to note that Tillich also differentiates between loneliness and solitude and further distinguishes between outer and inner loneliness. The concept of loneliness frequently appears in the context of individualism. Ontologically, it is understood as necessary, as indicated by the ontological polarity of individuation and participation (STh Volume 1). For Tillich, loneliness is more than a mere feeling; it is a constitutive characteristic of human existence, insofar as a person becomes an individual and thus

[6] Cf. Andreas Reckwitz, Die Chance des Alleinseins und das Risiko der Isolation, in: Forschung und Lehre 6.10.2022: https://www.forschung-und-lehre.de/zeitfragen/die-chance-des-alleinseins-und-das-risiko-der-isolation-5072 (last accessed October 24, 2024).

[7] Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Modernity. Cambridge 2000.

[8] Reckwitz 2022.

[9] Urs Stäheli, Soziologie der Entnetzung (Sociology of Disconnection), Frankfurt am Main 2021.

[10] Reckwitz 2022.

develops self-awareness and a unique sense of identity. This understanding aligns Tillich with the tradition of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. In his work "The Courage to Be" (GW XI), Tillich refers to Kierkegaard's daring to be an individual, Nietzsche's courage to face the abyss of non-being, and the experience of total isolation in confronting the message that "God is dead." Tillich argues that humans constantly seek escape routes to find an easier, more direct way out of loneliness. Spinoza's approach, which significantly influenced Schelling and which Tillich further develops as a Christian interpretation, is one such path. For in the experience of loneliness, the question inevitably arises as to what specifically the Christian religion might offer against the existential threat posed by loneliness. Here, the conceptual path is that humanity, in participating in the self-affirmation of Being-itself, finds an anchor for acknowledging loneliness. In this affirmation of loneliness as an expression of self-affirmation, one finds a way to limit the existential despair that would arise without it. Ultimately, it is the courage to be that sets a boundary against the destructive power of loneliness as a threat from non-being. Although Tillich rarely quotes in his works, he does so here with Spinoza: "Spinoza finds, on the basis of his Jewish mysticism, the answer (to the question: what power makes the conquest of desire and fear possible) in the idea of participation. The courage to be is possible because it is participation in the self-affirmation of Being-itself" (GW XI, 28). The conclusion of "The Courage to Be" makes it clear that Tillich sees no direct path from theism to overcoming loneliness. Such a religion would render people dependent and prevent them from developing into irreplaceable, unique personalities. Instead, Tillich speaks of self-affirmation as an infinitely significant microcosmic representative of the universe (GW XI, 94). He draws the world into the individual. This active construction allows for a genuine relativization of the experience of loneliness, as the individual understands themselves in relation to the world for the first time.

Tillich explores the theme of loneliness less through philosophical discourse and more within biblical narratives, as seen in a 1913 sermon delivered in Berlin-Moabit on John 5:7 (GW XIII, 64–68, german citations translated by the author): "Lord, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred." (GW XIII, 64). He reflects on the phrase "I have no one" spoken by a man in need of healing who is already at the place of healing yet sees no chance of being healed. Tillich addresses various groups and their experiences of loneliness—parents, children, young adults, and widowed or elderly individuals. Here, he differentiates between inner and outer loneliness. He rules out the notion that the problem of loneliness in society can be solved simply by establishing social connections. Much of Tillich's sermon is devoted to acknowledging the existential situation of loneliness: "The highest joy and the deepest pain—they are lonely. 'I have no one,' resounds from the depths of the soul at all times" (GW XIII, 67). A healing shift occurs as Tillich then transitions in his sermon to a "You" and thereby directly addresses his listeners. Referring to the Passion narrative, Tillich describes God's loneliness and the loneliness of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, opening a communicative space within the sermon. Humanity encounters God, the Eternal, as Tillich puts it, evoking the significance of God's name within Jewish tradition. His focus is not so much on alleviating the social condition of loneliness as it is on perceiving and transforming the internal condition. His concern lies in altering the interpretation of "I have no one." He concludes with an affirmation to himself: "I have one who became lonely for my sake. God himself became lonely to be forever one with me. Now loneliness has died. Amen." (GW XIII, 68).

A second contribution appears in Tillich's "Gesammelte Werke" in his writings on the philosophy of religion, specifically in "Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality", Chicago 1955.[11] Here, Tillich describes the necessity of loneliness for a religious leader. There is a notable continuity in content between this text, written 42 years after his 1913 sermon. Tillich argues that biblical religion often speaks of the loneliness of God's men but rarely of their solitude or separation from the group that rejects them. He believes that, as he puts it, the ontological question is posed in solitude (GW XI, 163). Once again, Tillich connects loneliness with the intellectual pursuit that defines the philosopher—a theme he had previously introduced in his 1913 sermon. He mentions

[11] Paul Tillich, Biblical religion and the search for ultimate reality. Chicago 1955.

Heraclit, Socrates, the Stoics, Spinoza, and the mystics: "They went into the wilderness, never to return. And it was the same for the modern skeptics who hid from intolerance in times of dogmatism, concealed under various masks. This must be so, for the first step toward becoming a creative philosopher is radical doubt. The philosopher questions not only the traditions and symbols of the community to which they belong but also everything that is called the 'natural worldview,' the assumptions of 'common sense' shared by all. Whoever earnestly asks, 'Why is there something, why not nothing?' has felt the shock of non-being and, in thought, transcended everything that exists in nature and humanity… And do we not all experience, whether aligned with biblical religion or driven to radical doubt, something of the prophet's fate and something of the philosopher's fate within ourselves, even if in a less radical form?" (GW XI, 164). Loneliness is part of the existential condition of being human, unescapable and painful. But it looks as if loneliness can be transformed into solitude: A status in which you can become aware of your own being as part of being itself. It still contains loneliness, but in a transformed way: painful ambivalences like e. g. the situation of being isolated are less harmful. The reason for this is probably that people no longer focus solely on the lack of social relationships and recognition, on their fear to get isolated e. g. by age, sickness or death. Loneliness in this sense opens doors to a deeper Self-reference that people would not be able to seize without it. It would also be useful here to reflect on Tillich's understanding of prayer. As a basic attitude of faith, it appears to be a possibility to transform loneliness into solitude. But as has already been said, solitude should not be idealized, nor as a harmonious relationship between man and God in faith; it also has ambivalent traits, even if it can provide moments of bliss.

Theological Considerations for Today

From a theological perspective, it seems evident that religions possess resources to counter loneliness. They have long been known for fostering community, with their rituals celebrated in groups, thus promoting a communal orientation. Digital religious practices show how online Christian communities, for example, are addressing this need: connectivity and networking underscore how relationships are actively lived in religious contexts digitally. Even within Protestant contexts, there is a strong call for local community within congregations. When people who might share this experience are absent, the sense of isolation is even more pronounced. Building on Tillich's insights—as well as sociological and philosophical frameworks—there is, first and foremost, a need to recognize loneliness without immediately seeking to dispel it. It remains a task of diaconal, cultural, and religious action to cultivate and promote communicative relationship cultures both within and outside church settings. Tillich scarcely addressed this, yet it is crucial for socially isolated individuals. Existential inner loneliness can likely only be endured if it can be socially shared. But on the other hand relatedness cannot eliminate ontologically felt loneliness. On the other hand a complete withdrawal into prayer or meditation is not without risk, as it can lead to a detachment from the world.

Tillich could have more precisely explored the risks and opportunities here, considering the ambivalence of religious practices. Instead, he leaves us with a more specifically religious question: is it possible for you to feel your inner loneliness and to express radical doubt in the relationships that constantly keep us engaged with the world? Busy activity is also insufficient for resolving inner loneliness, as it is an inherent aspect of being human. Engaging with one's own loneliness is, rather, a path to a more grounded way of living. And this, at least according to the mystical element in Tillich's theology, leads to a participation in the Being-itself: the awareness of being held in being itself. It might be permissible to say, that the idea that one's own life can reach such a depth is the reason why people long for solitude, even if it is not easy to bear the loneliness that always accompanies the solitude. As theologians, however, we must ensure that we do not trivialize the dangers of social loneliness in favor of this longing for solitude, including the solitude in God.

Intersectionality and Estrangement: The Situation of Women in Afghanistan and the Thought of Paul Tillich

Matthew Lon Weaver

Introduction

Today, the plagues of military and cultural hostilities continue, compelling us to face the defiant forces of racism and nationalism again. Dominant nations

exercise power using their too frequent tool of international policy: brute force. This essay addresses one strand of that story: that of the women of Afghanistan and their return to harsh, patriarchal oppression under the Taliban who returned to power in August 2021. Further, it considers Paul Tillich's interpretation of existence as the ambiguous drama pitting destructive estrangement against the reality of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. Still further, it draws on critical race theory, harvesting its idea of intersectionality as a theoretical tool in the hands of Kimberlé Crenshaw, operating in harmony with the New Being to more deeply understand the estrangement experienced by the women of Afghanistan and the particular ambiguity – if not the hopelessness – of their future.

The Crisis of the Women of Afghanistan

The Euro-American interpretation of Afghan history tends to be superficial, focusing on events of recent decades.[12] Historian Thomas Barfield has noted that a typical conversation with Afghan people – whether educated or illiterate – would begin with the topic of the long-term destruction wreaked by the Mongol invasion of the 13th century, not to mention empires preceding them centuries before.[13]

When the conversation turns to the two-decade occupation by the United States which followed the models of both the United Kingdom in the 19th century and the Soviet colonization in the late 20th century, the sense is that each imposed models from their own countries upon Afghan culture, resulting in varying degrees of disruption in the lives of the people of Afghanistan until these foreign powers relented to existing Afghan approaches.[14] The responses to this by groups such as the Taliban led to the stereotype of Afghanistan as a historical terror state.

What the creators of these strategies failed to understand was that the deeper, longer history of Afghanistan in the period prior to the 19th century was one in which it thrived on its international relationships as a crossroad of trade between East Asian cultures, the Asian subcontinent, and the Middle East. In light of this history, a combination of economic aid, international alliances, and respect for local political approaches to undeniable challenges could have been much more successful, undermining the rise of destructive radicalism.[15] The failure to do so has been devastating for the women of Afghanistan.

The first – and now second – rise of the Taliban created an important challenge to both Afghanistan's meaningful relationship to the international community and the improvement of the situation of its excluded minorities, in particular, the women of Afghanistan.[16] Continuous news of greater restrictions of the lives of Afghan women echoes the horrific experiences of women under the first emirate, in and outside of Afghanistan.[17] Steven Coll argues that this set of facts must be faced: at the end of the day, "The Taliban are a fact of life in global politics, but so are international law and the worldwide status of women and girls…[and] abandoning Afghanistan to its fate is not a moral or

[12] It tends to begin with the 1979 invasion of the Soviet Union or the 2001 attack of the United States in pursuit of the Taliban protectors of the propagators of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, or more recently the withdrawal of the U.S. after a twenty-year, failed effort to mold Afghanistan into the shape of a democracy of its own ilk.

[13] Thomas Barfield, "What History Can Teach Us about Continental Afghanistan," *Education about Asia* 17, no. 1 (Fall 2012), 6. At the least, one should consider presence of the Persian Empire in the 6th century BCE, followed by Alexander the Great in the 4th century BCE, the Kushan Empire in the 1st century CE, the entry of Arabs of the 7th century, and ensuing chapters in subsequent history (6, 7-9).

[14] Ibid., 7-9.

[15] Ibid., 9. Even more, the sense of identity in the region was significantly dictated by ethnicity and religious culture, not by imposed national boundaries. The failure to acknowledge – much less respect – that rich history was arguably at the root of responses to the failure of each of the more experiments of colonial statecraft.

[16] Steve Coll, "Who Are the Taliban Now?" *The New York Review of Books*, LXX, no. 11 (June 22, 2023). A majority of the young men who serve in the military were not born at the time of its first Islamic Emirate. In the two years since the withdrawal of the United States, Afghan society has returned to its largely pre-September 2001 state of affairs, at least in country. Yet, even the younger generations living there now experienced access to western sources of information and culture. Further, those in exile are not silenced.

[17] Ibid., 26. Further, there are limits to what those with interest in the economic success of Afghanistan will accept as consequences to the crimes against humanity sanctioned by the theocratic ruler of Afghanistan. Still further, while it seems anemic, there continue to be some level of contacts between the Western democracies – including the U.S. – and officials in Afghanistan.

self-interested choice for either the U.S. or Europe."[18] The dual embarrassments of the Trump administration's negotiation of a U.S. departure from Afghanistan with the Taliban rather than its sitting government and the Biden administration's bumbling withdrawal of American forces – absent any meaningful efforts to jumpstart and reshape the west's relationships to Afghanistan through profoundly more empowering approaches to them – resulted in a mystifying, absurd, and catastrophic outcome in August 2021 and thereafter.[19]

The consequence for Afghan women was an overt contradiction to the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. While Larry Goodson of the National Army War College argues that "the foundation of Taliban governance is based on subjugation of women…[with a] wide array of specific policies promulgated and implemented to achieve that end,"[20] and while story after story attest to the dramatic existential attack upon Afghan women in a culture afflicted by the "disease of Talibanization" and a nation having "vanished [a] gender,"[21] the goal of "improving the plight of Afghan women and girls was a central message of the U.S." for its commitment to invest nearly $800 million to empower women to live free, meaningful lives.[22] Typical of the experience of urban situation was that of a 30-year-old woman by the name of Hosni who "would include visiting the gym after a day at the office, or meeting friends for coffee inside one of the city's trendy cafés, pockets of calm and sanctuary where young women could freely socialize. Today, her office is shut and she sits at home, directionless," leading her to conclude that "'the U.S. is taking back what it gave to us.'"[23] According to U.N. Women (The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women), "since August 2021, Afghan women and girls have been grappling with increasingly restrictive decrees limiting their participation in all aspects of social, economic, and political life," confining millions of women to their homes, restricting their important contributions to society,[24] with the net of oppression drawn ever tighter by the Taliban and further exacerbated by earthquakes in wester Afghanistan and less tolerance of undocumented Afghan migrants in Pakistan (80% of which are women and children).[25]

In an effort to defy the Taliban's effort to make women of Afghanistan invisible, U.N. Women created the *After August* project, an online space for Afghan women to share their thoughts and experiences in the period following the Taliban's return to power in 2021. Here are the stories of four women who posted on the site identified by first names: Arefa, Farah, Humaira, and Khadija. Arefa displays the yearning of many Afghan women:

"I am a women's rights activist who has been working in this field for seven years. In 2019, we established a civil society organization that helps people in the areas of health, education and humanitarian assistance [and sometimes gender-based violence] …my wish, as an Afghan woman, is to have the right to work, get an education and the right to express my opinion and make my own decisions."[26]

Another voice was that of Farah, a teacher and midwife in several hospitals prior to the return of the Taliban and its rigid restrictions. She has worked "directly and indirectly…to fight for the rights of Afghan women and girls. I raised my voice against

[18] Ibid., 28.

[19] See Amber Phillips, "Trump's deal with the Taliban, explained," *The Washington Post* (26 Aug. 2021), https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/08/20/trump-peace-deal-taliban/ and

[20] Larry P. Goodson, "Anti-Modernist Islam: Understanding Taliban Treatment of Women in Afghanistan," 2002, 9-18, retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9g15x848, accessed 8 Feb. 2022. These range from control over appearance in public, very limited access to work, little to no right to education, seriously inadequate health care, high control over dress, no political representation, and little voice in legal disputes. The religious/theological bases for this level control is in dispute, and the leaders imposing them are from rural areas and often illiterate.

[21] Ibid., 17

[22] Zahra Nader and Amie Ferris-Rotman, "Freedom at Stake: What Afghan Women Stand to Lose under the Taliban" (13 Sept./20 Sept. 2021), 25.

[23] Ibid., 26.

[24] UN Women, "Photo essay: A glimpse into the lives of Afghan women" (7 March 2024), https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/photo-essay/2024/03/photo-essay-a-glimpse-into-the-lives-of-afghan-women#:~:text=Since%20August%202021%2C%20Afghan%20women,their%20important%20 contributions%20to%20society.

[25] Ibid.

[26] https://www.afteraugust.org/story/arefa-5

the policies of the Taliban to save Afghan women from this crisis."[27] As a result, she's been a repeated victim of violence and is forced to live in hiding because of her online criticism of the Taliban's policies. She is completely pessimistic about the future women in Afghanistan: "The Taliban have imposed so many restrictions on Afghan women and girls that today I even feel like I can't breathe… No one supports Afghan women. I never imagined myself so alone."[28]

The third woman, Humaira, was a high-achieving student in water supply engineering. She believes in the potential of women around the world to overcome the crisis of women Afghanistan. Her demand is this: "Please stop the misogyny and support Afghan women and girls. We want freedom. We want life."[29]

Finally, there is Khadija who once had positions in past Afghan governments. In light of the current situation, she describes her present role in this way: "Now, I am protesting with a group of rebel women for the freedom and rights of Afghan women, although we are captive behind the walls of our households."[30] As for the rest of the world, "The international community should listen to the voices of Afghan women and defend the protesting women and save those who are in serious danger."[31]

The impact of this culture-wide attack on the health and dignity of women is attested by Dr. Najmussama Shefajo, head of the Afghan Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and a gynecologist at her own private clinic in Kabul. She has experienced the erosion of personhood among the women of Afghanistan. Particularly poignant and dangerous is the vulnerability of teenage girls seeking to become pregnant as their parents pursue the cultural practice of marrying off daughters at an ever earlier age:

At her ob-gyn clinic in Kabul…she noticed that the number of 14- and 15-year-old girls who come to her wanting to get pregnant or are pregnant has doubled in the last two years… Women often face pressure to get pregnant from their husbands and in-laws. 'Most of them are anemic and they do not have their own bodies fully developed yet,' Dr. Shefajo said in a Zoom interview in early December [2023]. 'They are still kids in their height and their weight. Their bodies are not as mature as they can be to become a mother.'[32]

Faced with these types of experiences, small voices have arisen in surprising places. At the Paris Olympics in the summer of 2024, the lone Afghan woman sponsored by the Afghanistan Olympic Committee participating in the events – Kimia Yousofi – arrived from Australia where she has had respite from her home culture for the past two years. She participated in an initial heat of the 100-meter race wearing a message on her bib: "Education" and "Our Rights." Her counsel to Afghan women? "'Don't give up, don't let others decide for you. Just search for opportunity, and then use that opportunity,' she said."[33] Another Afghan woman participated in the games as member of the Refugee Olympic Team: Manizha Talash (known as "b-girl Talash"). In a pre-qualifier round, she opened her cape to display the message, "FREE AFGHAN WOMEN," which officials used to disqualify her for violating a rule forbidding the display of "a political slogan on her attire during the Pre-Qualifier competition."[34] *CBS News* told her story, quoting a 2023 UN report that judged Afghanistan as "the most repressive [nation] in the world for women and girls, who are deprived of virtually all their basic rights."[35] Pointing to the cultural cost of Taliban rule

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] https://www.afteraugust.org/story/humaira

[30] https://www.afteraugust.org/story/khadija-1

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Jack Snape, "Afghanistan 100m runner Kimia Yousofi sends Olympic message to the Taliban," *The Guardian* (2 Aug. 2024), https://www.theguardian.com/sport/article/2024/aug/02/afghanistan-100m-runner-kimia-yousofi-sends-olympic-message-to-the-taliban, 20 September 2024.

[34] Rosie Di Manno, "Young Afghan Olympics breaker b-girl Talash deserved applause, not disqualification," *Toronto Star* (11 Aug 2024), https://www.thestar.com/sports/olympics-and-paralympics/young-afghan-olympics-breaker-b-girl-talash-deserved-applause-not-disqualification/article_57e27b50-5680-11ef-9222-43a518fb6eb0.html, Accessed 20 September 2024.

[35] Ahmad Mukhtar, "An Olympic sprinter finished last in her preliminary heat. She came not to win but to be the 'voice of Afghan girls,'" *CBS News* (2 Aug. 2024), https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sprinter-kimia-yousofi-voice-

to Afghanistan, a Human Rights Watch's spokesperson declared that "'Afghanistan will never fully recover from these 1,000 days…The potential lost in this time – the artists, doctors, poets, and engineers who will never get to lend their country their skills – cannot be replaced. Every additional day, more dreams die.'"[36] Given those stakes, it goes beyond pettiness to render a disqualification to women possessing the courage to speak truth to worldwide power.

In light of the trajectory of the past three years, it was not a surprise that the Taliban's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice established a new code in the summer of 2024 that "bans women from raising their voices, reciting the Qur'an in public and looking at men other than their husbands or relatives, while requiring women to fully cover their heads and faces."[37] One activist observed that Afghanistan "'has turned into a graveyard for women's dreams,'" while others point to the inaction of the broader, international community: "'The silence of the world over the last three years will go down as a dark chapter in history.'"[38]

Intersectionality

An analytical concept that could be helpful in identifying and interpreting the layers of oppression experienced by the women of Afghanistan is intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw has cultivated an understanding of this tool as an active participant and leader in critical race theory research and its explorations into the strong presence of racism in the legal and judicial realms of the United States. Her work has highlighted ways critical race theory has emphasized "[white] racial power primarily through its impact on African-American males…[and] render[ing] the particular experiences of black females invisible."[39] Early in her career at UCLA Law School, she coined *intersectionality* as an apt term for the cultural situation of Black women in the 1989 article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." To that piece, the discussion will soon return. First, it describes the context woven together by her predecessors.

Crenshaw is rooted in a rich tradition, a fact that she clearly knows. Her thinking reaches back to Sojourner Truth's 1851 insights in a talk that came to be known as the "Ain't I a Woman" speech.[40] Truth's speech is a powerful embodiment of intersectionality because her words not only argued for the capacity of women to actively participate in the political process (in opposition to white men's judgment that women were too physically weak to have the stamina for politics) but did so as a Black woman. Thus, as Crenshaw puts it, "Truth's personal challenge to the coherence of the cult of true womanhood was useful only to the extent that white women were willing to reject the racist attempts to rationalize [this] contradiction – that because Black women were something less than real women, their experiences had no bearing on true womanhood."[41]

With that, subsequent Black women's voices painted further elements of this ongoing struggle. In her 1892 book, *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South*, Anna J. Cooper pointed to Black women as "confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both," such that in contrast to the experiences of white women as appreciated in their roles by white men, a Black woman "too often finds herself hampered and shamed by a less liberal sentiment and a more conservative attitude on the part of those for whose

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of-afghan-girls-paris-olympics/?intcid=CNI-00-10aaa3a, Accessed 4 August 2024.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Rick Noack, "Taliban begins enforcing new draconian laws, and Afghan women despair," *The Washington Post* (15 Sept. 2024), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/09/15/taliban-afghanistan-laws-women-rights/, Accessed 20 September 2024.

[38] Ibid.

[39] "Introduction," *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, eds. (New York: The New Press, 1995), xxi, xxvii, xxxi.

[40] According to the Sojourner Truth Project, there is some dispute over whether the phrase, "ain't I a woman," is anywhere in the original, though the central message she offered is that women have the stamina to participate in the political process. See https://www.thesojournertruthproject.com/compare-the-speeches/.

[41] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Issue 1, Article 8 (1989), 153-54.

opinion she cares most," that of Black men.[42] Amy-Jacques Garvey stated the same thing in an October 1925 editorial to *The Negro World* – "that black men are less appreciative of their women than white men," yet, despite – and, perhaps because of – the fact that Black women have "borne the rigors of slavery, the deprivations consequent on a pauperized race, and the indignities heaped upon a weak and defenseless people…[even] suffering all with fortitude," she "stands ever ready to help in the onward march to freedom and power."[43]

Eight years later, in a June 1933 address to the Chicago Women's Federation – "A Century of Progress of Negro Women" – Mary McLeod Bethune described the shift in the situation of Black women. On the one hand was the stark reality of her past: "she was the most pathetic figure on the American continent. She was not a person, in the opinion of many, but a thing" objectified, without respect.[44] As Bethune put it, "a household drudge, – a means for getting distasteful work done; she was an animated agricultural implement to augment the service of mules and plows in cultivating and harvesting the cotton crop."[45] Worse, "she was an automatic incubator, a producer of human livestock, beneath whose heart and lungs more potential laborers could be bred and nurtured and brought to the light of toilsome day."[46] But things were changing: "Today she stands side by side with the finest manhood the race has been able to produce."[47]

Three decades later, Mahalia Jackson shed light on the centrality of Black women in maintaining the dignity of the Black family. Jackson argued that even in the most violently distasteful elements of Black women's roles during enslavement, "when she let the white man have his way with her" and when a Black woman "went with the plantation master or the field overseer or his sons so they would be easier on" Black men, she was exerting "some control over the white men and could make them act more kindly toward her people."[48] Further, because Black men were demeaned by the undignified work to which they were restricted, as well as being victimized by abusive rhetoric that attacked Black men's pride and personhood in the face of this mistreatment, the Black mother was the one who was able "to keep a certain dignity in the family to offset the inferiority the white man inflicted on her husband. She held her head up high and she showed the way to her children…"[49] Applying the impact of this to the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, Jackson declared, "When I hear people talking about Communists being behind the colored students, I have to laugh. It's not the Communists – it's Negro mothers who believe it's time for their children to fight for their rights and a good education."[50]

At about this time, Dara Abubakari (Virginia E.Y. Collins) echoed Mahalia Jackson's characterization of the roles Black men were permitted to have in the post-enslavement period, as well as the empowering shift that later occurred, noting that this compelled the Black community to address both racism and sexism: "the law was strictly against the black man...so he could not do anything. Now that he speaks, we speak together. We cannot separate, and this is what I say to the Women's Lib movement. You cannot separate men from women when you're black."[51]

In a May 1971 address to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund Institute – "The Special Plight and the Role of Black Woman" – Fannie Lou Hamer pointed to the

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[42] Anna J. Cooper, "The Colored Woman Should Not Be Ignored," in *Black Women in White America* , ed. Gerda Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1972/1992), 573. *NOTE: Please be aware that some excerpts include dated and offensive terms, oftentimes dictated by White authors at that time the sources were written – such as "colored" or "Negro" – that current practice rejects as unacceptable.*

[43] Amy-Jacques Garvey, "Women as Leaders," in *Black Women in White America* , ed. Gerda Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1972/1992), 578-9.

[44] Mary McLeod Bethune, "A Century of Progress of Negro Women," in *Black Women in White America* , ed. Gerda Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1972/1992), 580.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Mahalia Jackson with E. M. Wylie, *Movin On Up* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1966), in *Black Women in White America* , ed. Gerda Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1972/1992), 584-5.

[49] Ibid., 585.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Dara Abubakari (Virginia E.Y. Collins), "The Black Woman Is Liberated in Her Own Mind (October 11, 1970 Interview)," in *Black Women in White America* , ed. Gerda Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1972/1992), 586.

experiential vulnerability – and, ultimately, responsibility – of white women:

> Sometimes I really feel more sorrier for the white woman than I feel for ourselves because she been caught up in this thing, caught up feeling very special, and folks, I'm going to put it on the line, because my job is not to make people feel comfortable. You [white women] have been caught up in this thing because, you know, you worked my grandmother, and after that you worked my mother, and then finally you got hold of me. And you really thought, people – you might try and cool it now, but I been watching you, baby. You thought that you was *more* because you was a woman, and especially a white woman, you had this kind of angel feeling that you were untouchable…You had been put on a pedestal, and then not only put on a pedestal, but you had been put in something like a ivory castle. So what happened to you, we have busted the castle open and whacking like hell for the pedestal. And when you hit the ground you're *gone* have to fight like hell, like we've been fighting all this time.[52]

Seven years later – and eight years before she wrote *AIN'T I A WOMAN: black women and feminism* – bell hooks noted that "friends and strangers were quick to question and ridicule my concern with the lot of black women in the United States."[53] When she described the focus of the book, "one person, in a booming voice choking with laughter exclaimed, 'What is there to say about black women!' Others joined the laughter."[54] She concluded "that the existence of black women was often forgotten, that we were often ignored or dismissed, and my lived experience as I shared ideas in this book demonstrated the truth of this assertion."[55]

In the decade before Crenshaw's important article, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Toni Morrison summoned white and Black women to consider the complexity of the situation of Black women. In 1979, Audre Lorde offered critiques of white feminism and its exclusion of the thought of Black women in the academy. In an open letter to Mary Daly on the occasion of the publication of Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, Lorde pointed to Daly's omission of African goddesses in her treatment of the power of the goddess tradition[56] as well as her treatment of noneuropean women as mere victims and "preyers-upon each other," silent about "images of my foremothers in power."[57] Lorde suspected that Daly was ignorant of racism within feminism: "Within the community of women, racism is a reality force in my life as it is not in yours. The white women with hoods on in Ohio handing out KKK literature on the street may not like what you have to say, but they will shoot me on sight."[58] A month later, Lorde addressed white feminists associated with the 1979 *Second Sex Conference*, pointing to their theoretical and patriarchal homogeneity, their failure to see the centrality of a dialectic – an interdependence fully invested in embracing difference – rather than

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[52] Fannie Lou Hamer, "It's in Your Hands," in *Black Women in White America* , ed. Gerda Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1972/1992), 610.

[53] bell hooks, "acknowledgment," *AIN'T I A WOMAN: black women and feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid. Twenty-two years before hooks' entry into the discussion of intersectionality, Martin Luther King, Jr. – having come to embrace a bleak realism regarding the situation of Black Americans – described the United States as "an arena of blasted hopes and shattered dreams," with the Black community "living in a triple ghetto – A ghetto of race, a ghetto of poverty, a ghetto of human misery," citing Frederick Douglass' 1863 observation that emancipation of African Americans in 1863 was "freedom to hunger…freedom without roofs to cover their heads…[and] freedom without land to cultivate" (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Other America," 14 April 1967, https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/evolution /files/2020/06/MLK-The-Other-America.pdf, accessed 14 Nov. 2023. Ten days after delivering "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence" – effectively severing his relationship to the Johnson administration – King offered his address, "The Other America," at Stanford University, the source of these comments). Approaching the end of the speech, he addressed the multi-level consequences of the Johnson administration's priorities: the Vietnam war ending the lives of both young soldiers and little Vietnamese boys and girls; and the combination of that war and a race to the moon that seriously weakened the President Johnson's war on poverty, leaving its beneficiaries to bear its cost.

[56] Audre Lorde, "History Is a Weapon: An Open Letter to Mary Daly," *Sister Outsider*, Sept. 1979, https:// www.historyisa weapon. com/defcon1/lordeopenlettertomarydaly.html, 23 Feb. 2022. "Where was Afrekete, Y emanje, Oyo, and Mawulisa? Where were the warrior goddesses of the Vodun, the Dahomeian Amazons…?"

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

consenting to mere tolerance.[59] She asserted that "difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged."[60] Poor, lesbian, black, and older women knew this,[61] learning "how to take [their] differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*."[62] The voice of bell hooks became prominent two years later with her 1981 book cited above, *"Ain't I a Woman?"* – inspired by that same, famous speech of Sojourner Truth.[63] There, hooks critiqued white feminism and its omission of race and economic status as crucial to understanding the experience of Black women.[64]

In the same period, there was the view of Toni Morrison. In addition to her profound novels, she wrote a range of occasional pieces, one of which was her commencement address to the Barnard Class of 1979, "Cinderella's Stepsisters." There, she called the women graduating that day to reject the temptation to violence toward each other, to "pay as much attention to [their] nurturing sensibilities as to [their] ambition."[65] At the heart of her message, she admonished the new graduates: "I want not to ask you but to *tell* you not to participate in the oppression of your sisters…You are moving in the direction of freedom, and the function of freedom is to free somebody else…Women's rights is not only an abstraction, a cause; it is also a personal affair…not only about 'us'; it is also about me and you. Just the two of us."[66]

More than four decades later, a recent existential expression of intersectionality in the United States contrasted politics with cinematic art. At the conclusion of 2024, Americans looked back on a presidential election in which the first Black was the candidate of a major party: Vice-President Kamala Harris. She was defeated, and while she received little hate-speech over social media during her campaign (perhaps because of her late entry into the race), African American women participating in Congressional races received substantially more hate-speech than candidates within all other demographics. However, Harris' opponent (Donald Trump) continued his history of misogyny and racism, strategically mispronouncing her name and fixating – even exoticizing – her ethnicity for the purpose of racially "othering" her. Tragically, white women responded by giving Trump greater support than in any of his three campaigns.[67] In poignant contrast to the election, and less than a month after it, was the opening of part 1 of the film version of the musical, *Wicked*. It offered a timely reminder of the pervasive and destructive impact of multi-layered "othering" targeted at two of its central

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[59] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table – Women of Color Press, 1981), 98, 100. She wrote, "It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory in this time and in this place without examining our many differences and without a significant input from poor women, black and third world women, and lesbians" (98).

[60] Ibid., 99. "As women we have been taught to either ignore our differences or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community, there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression" (99).

[61] They were "formed in the crucibles of difference." Ibid., 99.

[62] Ibid., 99.

[63]Debra Michalsm, "Sojourner Truth," *National Women's History Museum* (National Women's History Museum, 2015) accessed 14 Nov. 2023.

[64] Clay Risen, "bell hooks, Pathbreaking Black Feminist, Dies at 69," *New York Times* (20 Dec. 2021), www.newyorktimes/2021/12/15/books/bell-hooks-dead.html, accessed 20 December 2021. Later, the wrinkle of religious/spiritual identity became part of her understanding, describing herself as a Christian Buddhism, having close ties to Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh (Risen).

[65] Toni Morrison, "Cinderella's Stepsisters," in *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), 111.

[66] Ibid., 111, 112.

[67] D. Thakur and M. Finkel, (2024) "Hated More: Online Violence Targeting Women of Color Candidates in the 2024 US Election," *Center for Democracy & Technology and the Ford Institute for Human Security* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2024), https://cdt.org/insights/report-hated-more-online-violence-targetingwomen-of-color-candidates-in-the-2024-us-election/; Michael Dru Kelley, "Trump & team intentionally mispronouncing Kamala's name is racist and dehumanizing," *The Advocate* (14 October 2024), https://www.advocate.com/voices/trump-mispronouncing-kamala; Walter H. White, Jr., "Kamala Harris is Black & Asian and Why Does Trump Care?" *The Fulcrum* (9 August 2024), https://thefulcrum.us/election-2024/kamala-harris-race; and Carter Sherman, "2024 US elections takeaways: how female voters broke for Harris and Trump," *The Guardian* (6 November 2024), https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/nov/06/election-trump-harris-women-voters.

characters.[68] From politics to film, the echo-chamber of multi-layered injustices – toward Black women in the United States and the vulnerable anywhere – continues to resonate.

With this rich history in hand, the discussion returns to Kimberlé Crenshaw's "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." Her argument is that the dominant, "single-axle analysis" to antidiscrimination jurisprudence fails to address "the multidimensionality of Black women's experience," thereby failing to render justice for the vulnerable who are subject to powerful forces in the American industrial complex.[69]

Crenshaw's first premise is built on an analysis of three federal cases from the 1970s and 1980s addressing the Civil Rights Act of 1964. She draws out the dominant pattern holding sway in the federal judicial system regarding labor challenges to management in this field, identifying three ways federal law fails to acknowledge the legitimate rights of Black women, captured in the concept of intersectionality. In her second premise, Crenshaw identifies three ways that white feminism has failed to understand the significance of intersectionality for just, fair outcomes in treating Black women's experiences. And as she pushes toward her conclusion, she constructs a final premise composed of four illustrations of cultural analysis that show the pattern of the dominant doctrine's defiant turn away from justice for Black women. The discussion now turns to these matters in detail.

The three federal cases Crenshaw examined were *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* (1976), *Moore v. Hughes Helicopter* (1983), and *Payne v. Travenol* (1982). In *DeGraffenreid*, Black women at General Motors sued the company over a seniority system that discriminated against Black women through its failure to include Black women who were excluded from employment prior to 1964 or were fired due to a 1970 negotiated layoff without the protection of seniority.[70] In rejecting their claims, the court argued that Black women "'should not be allowed to combine statutory remedies to create a new *super-remedy* which would give them relief beyond what the drafters of the relevant statutes intended.'" The court insisted that Black women be considered by their racial identity or sexual identity, not both. Crenshaw explains that in refusing "to acknowledge that Black women encounter combined race and sex discrimination," the court implied "that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination doctrine are defined respectively by white women's and black men's experiences," and Black women needed to fit themselves within one or the other.[71]

In the second case, Moore sued Hughes for discriminating against Black women in its promotion system based on race and sex. The court seemed to reject the argument that Moore could represent all women, and it considered the category of Black woman to be an illegitimate hybrid. Crenshaw observed that the failure to acknowledge multiple dimensions of discrimination within a person undermines the possibility of restructuring multiple-discriminatory systems. As a result, "'bottom-up' approaches, those which combine all discriminations in order to challenge an entire employment system, are foreclosed by the limited view of the wrong and the narrow scope of the available remedy."[72] Further, in the court's restriction of the pool to Black women – versus Black women, white women, and Black men – it rejected the premise that there was a statistical basis for discrimination.[73]

In the third case, Payne argued for the existence of racial discrimination at a Travenol pharmaceutical plant, with the plaintiffs seeking remedy for years of disparities based on racism and sexism. Here, the court ruled that there was racial discrimination against Black women but did not give them standing to represent Black men, as well.[74] As Crenshaw points out, the court required Black

[68] Kirsten Carey, "*Wicked*'s Timely Politics Are More Powerful and Intersectional Than Ever," *The Mary Sue* (12 December 2024), https://www.themarysue.com/wickeds-timely-politics-are-more-powerful-and-intersectional-than-ever/.

[69] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Issue 1, Article 8 (1989), 139-140.

[70] Ibid., 141.

[71] Ibid., 142-3.

[72] Ibid., 144-5.

[73] Ibid., 146.

[74] Ibid., 147-48.

women to "choose between specifically articulating the intersectional aspects of their subordination, thereby risking their ability to represent Black men, or ignoring intersectionality in order to state a claim that would not lead to the exclusion of Black men," an innately divisive consequence for the vulnerable.[75] Using the metaphor of traffic intersections, Crenshaw asserts:

> Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination…Yet often they experience double-discrimination – the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex.[76]

Crenshaw challenges the dominant, doctrinal position for its fundamental failure to see the nuances of discrimination. It defiantly rejects "a bottom-up commitment to improve the substantive conditions for those who are victimized by the interplay of numerous factors," satisfied with acknowledging "only the limited extent to which race or sex interferes with the process of determining outcomes."[77] To clarify the implications of the multiplicity of discrimination, Crenshaw provides another metaphor:

> Imagine a basement which contains all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age, and/or physical ability. These people are stacked – feet standing on shoulders – with those on the bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors, up to the very top, where the heads of all those disadvantaged by a singular factor brush against the ceiling. Their ceiling is actually the floor above which only those who are *not* disadvantaged in any way reside.[78]

The higher you are on the stack of the oppressed, the greater your chance of having your injustice remedied; the lower you are in the stack, the lesser your opportunity to receive justice.

Proceeding with the second premise of her argument, Crenshaw criticizes the racial ignorance of white feminist interpretations of the situation of Black women on three fronts. First, white feminist thought has tended to function within white stereotypes and an ideology regarding gender roles that regularly ignore contrasting norms between white and Black communities, with Black women being judged for violating gender expectations to *not* work outside the home.[79] Second, laws addressing rape tended to presume white males' oversight of white females' sexuality while Black women were judged to be less chaste and, as a consequence, particularly vulnerable:

> The singular focus on rape as a manifestation of male power over female sexuality tends to eclipse the use of rape as a weapon of racial terror. When Black women were raped by white males, they were being raped not as women generally, but as Black woman specifically: Their femaleness made them sexually vulnerable to racist domination, while their Blackness effectively denied them any protection…[T]he successful conviction of a white man for raping a Black woman was virtually unthinkable.[80]

Third and finally, the lynching of Black men as a tool of regulating white women's sexuality made it profoundly difficult for Black women to even voice their experiences of racial violence: "Black women are caught between ideological and political currents that combine first to create and then to bury Black women's experiences."[81]

Finally, Crenshaw offered a third premise focusing on four illustrations that shed light on the culture that predisposed the dominant doctrine's failure to identify acts of discrimination in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and, as a result, unnecessarily turned its face away from the situation of Black women. Her first example was a personal

[75] Ibid., 148.

[76] Ibid., 149.

[77] Ibid., 150, 151.

[78] Ibid., 151.

[79] Ibid., 154-56.

[80] Ibid., 158-59.

[81] Ibid., 159, 160.

experience. She described receiving an invitation – along with another Black classmate – from a fellow Black law student to an event at a Harvard men's club, one that had included very few Black members. Crenshaw's sexual identity – she was the only woman of the three of them – prohibited her from entering the location of the event by the front door, requiring her (in an effort not to make a scene) to enter by the back door. The second example was the 1965 report by Daniel Moynihan on the "Negro" family that concluded that the Black family had broken down such that it led to "the destruction of the Black male householder" and led Moynihan to decry "the Black matriarch…as pathological for their 'failure' to live up to a white standard of motherhood."[82] In the third instance, Crenshaw focused on Bill Moyers' 1986 documentary, *The Vanishing Black Family*, which ostensibly echoed the Moynihan report, but more searingly attacked "female-headed households as a problem of irresponsible sexuality, induced in part by government policies that encouraged family breakdown."[83] In the fourth and final example, Crenshaw highlighted William Julius Wilson's 1987 book, *The Truly Disadvantaged* and its sociological analysis of inner city life. While she appreciated Wilson's rejection of the moral judgmentalism of the Moynihan and Moyers pieces on the Black community, she rejected Wilson's alignment with the two other reports by making Black women his target in condemning "the proliferation of female-headed households as dysfunctional *per se*."[84]

Thus, intersectionality grew out of critical race theory, aligned with sociological, womanist, literary, and civil rights activism that preceded it, and became appropriated by various fields.[85] With justice for the multi-vulnerable deeply woven into it, it becomes a meaningful tool for identifying injustices wherever they arise and however many layers they involve. Here, it can be helpful in identifying the complexities of the denial of meaningful, dignified life in the experiences of women in Afghanistan. Now, the discussion turns to the ethical-theological framework of Paul Tillich and its possible relationship to intersectionality and the possibility of their conceptual partnership in understanding ways forward for the women of Afghanistan.

Tillich: Estrangement and the New Being

Turning to Paul Tillich's thought and its potential insights regarding the recent crises for the women of Afghanistan, the discussion now focuses on his *Systematic Theology* and his dialectical method of correlation: placing the pole of the existential, temporal situation over against Christianity's "answers [to] the questions implied in the 'situation' in the power of the eternal message...,"[86] what Tillich described as the "independence and interdependence of existential questions and theological answers."[87]

From an ontological perspective, unrelentingly focused on "being" – that is, what it means "to be" within existence – and "presuppos[ing] an asking subject and an object about which the question is asked," Tillich's method "presuppose[d] the self-world structure as the basic articulation of being."[88]

[82] Ibid., 163.

[83] Ibid., 164.

[84] Ibid., 165.

[85] For example, a 1996 article on education inequality includes a graph showing fourteen types of privilege with fourteen corresponding types of "oppression/resistance." K.M. Pauly, "Describing the Emperor's New Clothes: Three Myths of Education (In)equality," in Ann Diller, et al, eds. *The Gender Question in Education: Theory, Pedagogy, and Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996). The "Privilege/Oppression/Resistance" table in Pauly's article includes the categories genderism, androcentrism, racism, eurocentrism, heterosexism, ableism, elitism, ageism, politics of appearance, class bias, language bias, colorism, religious oppression, and pro-natalism. In more recent work on "bystander collaboration," Kathy Obear identifies eighteen "social group identities" with their corresponding privileged and marginalized groups. Obear's resources are found at https://drkathyobear.com/. Her list of eighteen social group identities include age, race, biological sex, gender identity & gender expression, hierarchical level, sexual orientation, class, educational level, religion/spirituality, national origin, ableness/disability, ethnicity/culture, size/appearance, skin color/physical characteristics, marital status, parental status, athleticism, and geographic region. Given overlapping categories, taken together these identify twenty-two ways people define difference and use those differences to establish cultural superiority.

[86] Ibid., 6.

[87] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Volume Two* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 13. Hereafter, references to this volume will refer to it as *ST II*. The bulk of what immediately follows here focuses on "Part III: Existence and the Christ" of the second volume. The goal is to connect the subsequent application of his framework to his soteriology.

[88] *ST I*, 164. This is the foundation for all that follows in his interpretation of reality. The emphases here are the meaning of

Seeing essence as one's potential self and existence as one's actual self, he joined Kierkegaard, Marx, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche in rejecting Hegel's claim that reconciliation of the estranged can be finally accomplished within history.[89] He asserted that "Existence is estrangement and not reconciliation."[90] Thus, human existence – individually and institutionally, nationally and internationally – is, and has always been, a realm of estrangement, experienced in the perpetual "transition from essence to existence" that is "a universal quality of finite being."[91]

Informed by this, Tillich defined humanity as finite freedom and human existence as a combination of freedom and fate.[92] The sometimes excruciating implications of this fact is that "one belongs essentially to that from which one is estranged," estranged from one's true being as well as from the ground of one's being, Tillich's term for God.[93]

While some may argue for the use of estrangement in place of "sin" in theological discourse, Tillich maintained that estrangement pointed to the destiny or fate pole of human being, while sin is the correct term for the freedom pole that "expressed most sharply the personal character of estrangement over against its tragic side…accusingly point[ing] to the element of personal responsibility in one's estrangement."[94] He saw the three embodiments of estrangement as unbelief, *hubris*, and concupiscence.[95] In unbelief

human identity and the import of Jesus as the Christ as the New Being. Tillich – in addition to the emphases here - pointed to places in his theology where "being" has special significance: in his doctrine of God "where God is called being as being or the ground and the power of being"; in his theological anthropology in the distinction between humanity's essential and existential selves; and "in the doctrine of the Christ, where he is called the manifestation of the New Being, the actualization of which is the work of the divine Spirit (*ST II*, 10)."

[89] *ST II*, 21, 24.

[90] *ST II*, 25. With existence we fail to respect humanity and to manifest human essence, dishonoring human personhood. Communal identity within history is "a series of unreconciled conflicts, threatening [humanity] with self-destruction," while individual existence "is filled with anxiety and threatened by meaninglessness," all in contradiction to Hegel's picture of reality (*ST II*, 25 and 45).

[91] *ST II*, 36.

[92] Freedom is rooted in human potential; finitude relates to human destiny and its basic "character of necessity (*ST II*, 32)." The essential/existential transitions in the condition of finite freedom leave human existence in the state of estrangement that is comprehensive: "[Human beings] are estranged from the ground of [their] being, from other beings, and from [themselves]. The transitions from essence to existence result in personal guilt and universal tragedy (*ST II*, 44-5)." Within existence we are not what we "essentially are and ought to be" but are, to the contrary, estranged from our "true being (*ST II*, 45)."

[93] Ibid. Estrangement is both non-biblical and fully biblical to Tillich. It is non-biblical because the term is not used in scripture. It is fully biblical because the Bible is filled with impressive epic stories, dramatic prophetic pronouncements, poignant gospel narratives, and persuasive epistolary teachings that attest to the broad reality of estrangement (*ST II*, 45-6).

[94] *ST II*, 46.

[95] In unbelief, humanity "turns away from God…turns toward self… and loses [their] essential unity with the ground of [their] being and [their] world," doing so "through individual responsibility and through tragic universality (*ST II*, 47)." In *hubris*, human beings – growing out of their self-consciousness and centeredness – take unbelief to a new level as the full expression sin, "turning away from the divine center" to which they truly belong and "turning toward themselves as the center of their selves and [their] world (*ST II*, 50)." It is the "self-elevation" that fails to acknowledge human finitude, "identifying human cultural creativity with divine creativity…attributing infinite significance to humanity's finite cultural creations, making idols of them, elevating them into matters of ultimate concern (*ST II*,)." In *hubris*, "humanity [demonically] confuses natural self-affirmation with destructive self-elevation (*ST II*, 51)." In the third manifestation of estrangement – concupiscence – the starting place is human beings' separation from other human beings, driving them to seek reunion with others, a drive which is the basis for all forms of love: human beings' relational "poverty" drives them seek "abundance." It becomes estrangement as "the unlimited desire to draw the whole of reality into one's self. It refers to all aspects of man's relation to himself and to his world. It refers to physical hunger as well as to sex, to knowledge as well as to power, to material wealth as well as to spiritual values (*ST II*, 52)." Nero illustrated political concupiscence, Mozart's Don Juan, sexual concupiscence, and Goethe's Faust, intellectual concupiscence (*ST II*, 53). However, concupiscence can be misapplied. Tillich critiqued Freud's analysis of the human libido and Nietzsche's understanding of power as distortions due to their fixation on the existential dimension of human being without connecting libido and power to their essential dimension. As a corrective to Freudian thought, he asserted that the libido is not concupiscence…[rather,] it is an element of love united with the other qualities of love – *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*" seeking connection with the other (*ST II*, 54). In contrast, "Concupiscence, or distorted libido, wants one's own pleasure through the other being, but it does not want the other being (*ST II*, 54)." As a corrective to Nietzsche, Tillich asserted that will-to-power was a basic expression the power of being required for

human beings move their center from the divine center, in *hubris* human beings make themselves the center of not only their own selves but of their world as well, and in concupiscence, human beings exploit their self-elevation to the center of being in order to gorge on the totality of the world.[96] When people take these paths, "sin is a matter of freedom, responsibility, and personal guilt," yet woven into the ontological context in which "the destiny of estrangement is actualized by all free acts,"[97] reality's ontological contextuality. Tillich rejected simplistic judgments of collective guilt upon entire social entities that did not consider nuances of choice made by members of those entities: for example, the citizens of nations. However, no person – no citizen – was fully innocent of the sin of the group, "for their acts in which freedom was united with destiny have contributed to the destiny in which they participate."[98]

While Tillich asserted that human beings' estrangement from their "essential being is the universal character of existence," a fact that "is inexhaustibly productive of particular evils in every period," these "structures of destruction are not the only mark of existence. They are counterbalanced by structures of healing and reunion of the estranged" through which "God is creatively working in us" such that we "are never cut off from the ground of being, not even in the state of condemnation."[99] The gospels paint a picture of

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all of reality to exist and, thus, that "the [proper] distinction between man's essential self-affirmation and his existential striving for power of being without limit is not established" in Nietzsche's thought (*ST II*, 55).

[96] *ST II*, 51-2.

[97] *ST II*, 56. The interplay of essence and existence means that "the transformation of essential finitude into existential evil is a general characteristic of the state of estrangement," leading to seemingly endless structures of evil within reality (*ST II*, 68). Tillich saw these structures coming about in all categories of finite existence when people lose a "relation to the ultimate power of being" such that time becomes transitoriness rather than the eternal now, space becomes spatial contingency rather than the "eternal here," causation and substance become the realms of futile struggle against the chain of causes and the inevitable passing of substance (*ST II*, 69-70). Anxiety and suffering are the outcome of life experience untethered from the power of being. Tillich saw "aloneness" as the chief cause of meaningless suffering amidst existence (*ST II*, 71). The insecurity and uncertainty that characterizes the transition from essence to existence leads humanity along destructive paths in futile attempts to absolutize security and certainty within finitude, resulting in defensive strategies, "some of which are brutal, some fanatical, some dishonest, and all insufficient and destructive," perhaps "against those who represent the threat to false security and certainty" through "war and persecution," and – ultimately – against oneself (*ST II*, 73).

[98] *ST II*, 59. Such people "guilty, not of committing the crimes of which the group is accused, but of contributing to the destiny in which these crimes happened (*ST II*, 59)." This even includes the victims of political tyranny within a nation as well as "the subjects of other nations and of mankind as a whole (*ST II*, 59)." Tillich makes this connection through the destiny element of the freedom and destiny pairing which is the context of all human behavior: "For the destiny of falling under the power of tyranny, even a criminal tyranny, is a part of the universal destiny of man to be estranged from what he essentially is," which should also temper the exploitative impulses of nations who defeat tyrannies in war (*II*, 59). In Part IV of the *Systematic Theology* ("Life and the Spirit"), Tillich defined life "as the actualization of potential being. In every life process such actualization takes place." (Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Volume Three* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963], 30. Hereafter, references to this volume will refer to it as *ST III*.) Actualization of life proceeds beyond "the function of self-integration, the circular movement of life from a center and back to this center" to a second function through "the production of new centers, the function of self-creation (*ST III*, 30-1), to "the third direction in which actualization of the potential goes is in contrast to the circular and the horizontal – the vertical direction," the self-transcending function. In this, "Life, by its very nature as life, is both *in* itself and *above* itself (*ST III*, 31)." For this function, Tillich "used the phrase 'driving toward the sublime'… [with] 'sublime,' 'sublimation,' 'sublimity' pointing to 'going beyond limits' toward the great, the solemn, the high (*ST III*, 31)." In this way, life is "rooted in the basic self-world correlation (*ST III*, 32)."

[99] *ST II*, 74, 75, 78. This occurs in the religious dimension "where life receives the conqueror of the ambiguities of life, the divine Spirit" and where "the quest for the New Being appears over against the [universal] split between essential and existential being (*ST II*, 80)." In short, "The quest for the New Being presupposes the presence of the New Being…[and] it is universal because the human predicament and its ambiguous conquest are universal (*ST II*, 80, 86)." As interpreted in Christian thought, the New Being is active within history, affirming both the essential goodness of reality that "is not vitiated by its existential estrangement" as well as "the revelatory possibilities in every moment of history (*ST II*, 87, 88)." In this, "The Christ is God-for-us" and for all creation because "the relation of Eternal God-Manhood to human existence does not exclude other relations of God to other sections or levels of the existing universe (*ST II*, 100)." Tillich described the New Being as "essential being under the conditions of existence, conquering the gap between essence and existence…as the restorative principle" of his system through Jesus as the Christ, "the bearer of the New Being," the one who "has conquered existential

Jesus as the Christ manifesting (and holding together) "participation of the New Being in the conditions of existence" with "the victory of the New Being over the conditions of existence."[100]

As a result, three characteristics of salvation in the New Being – regeneration, justification, and sanctification – correspond to the three embodiments of estrangement.[101] Through regeneration, there is "faith instead of unbelief, surrender instead of *hubris*, love instead of concupiscence."[102] In justification, pure grace is embodied as "the eternal act of God by which he accepts as not estranged who are indeed estranged from him by guilt."[103] The only response of humanity to this is the acceptance of God's grace (in contrast to earning God's race).[104] And through sanctification, "the power of the New Being transforms personality and community, inside and outside the church."[105] Here, praxis is also key.

Praxis is the self-creation of life in the personal-communal realm,[106] "action aiming at growth under the dimension of spirit," and the good understood as "the essential nature of a thing and the potentialities implied in it."[107] In praxis, *humanity* is "the fulfilment of man's inner aim with respect to himself and his personal relation," and *justice* is "the fulfilment of the inner aim of social groups and their mutual relations."[108]

The push and pull of estrangement and the New Being are in the ambiguities of history as well.[109] In historical self-integration, the centrality of the power of being and of "God as *the* power of being" stands against non-being and the ambiguities of power within existence,[110] meaning that "every victory of the Kingdom of God in history is a victory over the disintegrating consequences of the ambiguity of power."[111] In historical self-creativity, the New Being seeks a unity of tradition on the one hand and

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estrangement in himself and in everyone who participates in him," and "the one in whom the conflict between the essential unity of God and [humanity] and [humanity's] existential estrangement is overcome (*ST II*, 118-9, 121, 125)." In "the New Being in Jesus as the Christ" history shows "the picture of a personal life which is subjected to all the consequences of existential estrangement but wherein estrangement is conquered in himself and a permanent unity is kept with God (*ST II*, 134-5)." Added to this, "The appearance of the Christ in an individual person presupposes the community out of which he came and the community which he creates (*ST II*, 136)."

[100] Ibid. And through the various symbols in the biblical accounts we see "the power of the New Being in threefold color: first and decisively, as the undisrupted unity of the center of his being with God; second, as the serenity and majesty of him who presents this unity against all the attacks coming from estranged existence; and, third, as the self-surrendering love which represents and actualizes the divine love in taking the existential self-destruction upon himself (*ST II*, 138)." Tillich later gives a sixfold description of the qualities of the atoning function of Jesus as the Christ. See *ST II,* 173-6.

[101] The regenerative outcomes of the New Being borne by Jesus as the Christ arise from "the new state of things, the new eon, which the Christ brought; the individual 'enters it,' and [thus] participates in it and is reborn through participation (*ST II*, 177)."

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., 178.

[104] *ST II*, 178-9. One of Tillich's most powerful and popular sermons expounds on this. See "You Are Accepted," *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 153-63.

[105] *ST II*, 179-80. "Both individual Christian and the church, both the religious and the secular realm, are objects of the sanctifying work of the divine Spirit, who is the actuality of the New Being."

[106] *ST III*, 65.

[107] *ST III*, 66, 67.

[108] *ST III*, 67. When he asked "what produces the tensions in the nature of humanity and justice, from which the ambiguities of their actualization result," he responded with both the general answer – "the infinite gap between subject and object under the conditions of estrangement" – as well as the specific answer: "In the functions of *praxis* the gap lies between the existing human subject and the object for which he strives – a state of essential humanity – and the gap between the existing social order and the object for which it strives – a state of universal justice (*ST III*, 67-8)." *NOTE: Tillich was writing in the pre-gender inclusion period, thus, the use of "man" as generic human being.*

[109] *ST III*, 339. Historical existence has ambiguities that align with the processes of the rest of existence: "the ambiguity of historical self-integration, the ambiguity of historical self-creativity, and the ambiguity of historical self-transcendence." The centering process of historical self-integration "involves the relation of intensive to extensive centeredness," the relation of a empire-building trend to the personal freedom, the former requiring a power that poses a threat to creativity rooted in freedom (*ST III*, 342).

[110] *ST III*, 385.

[111] Ibid. In particular, the Kingdom of God is victorious within existence "in institutions and attitudes [that] conquer, even if fragmentarily, that compulsion which usually goes with power and transforms the objects of centered control into mere objects (*ST III*, 385)." Democracy manifests God's Kingdom when it "serves to resist the destructive implications of power (*ST III*,

revolution's overcoming of the unfairness of social growth and its destructive consequences, on the other, "where…revolution is being built into tradition in such a way that…a creative solution in the direction of the ultimate aim of history is found."[112] And in historical transcendence, the New Being faces a sacramental church that overstates the presence of the Kingdom of God as well as a prophetic church that overstates a situation in expectation of the Kingdom of God.[113]

Despite its publication in the last fifteen years of his life, Tillich's *Systematic Theology* expresses the ontological framework with which he interpreted reality his entire career. Consistently, and in different forms, he asserted that freedom and fate means we act – we use our power – within limits. That was implied in his early work on Schelling and the potencies of 1910 and 1912. It was present in his call for action in the Weimar period, pursuing political agendas that required a sense of timing – of *kairos* – to determine when to act in ways that embodied love and justice rooted in a believing realism. It was embodied in his rejection of Hitler's hateful, racist, murderous civilizational paganism. It was present in the 1937 Oxford Conference on Life and Work where he argued for a social order that protected the vulnerable as a fragmentary manifestation of the Kingdom of God. It was in a 1938 speech in New York's Madison Square Garden where he spoke out against the antisemitism in the same arena where the Nazi-supporting German-American Bund gathered on several occasions in support of Hitler's cause. It was in his 1938 fragment on religion and world politics that he advocated for a just world order that rejected the ideology of a national sovereignty that seemed predisposed to collapse into isolationist, xenophobic nationalism. It was in the Voice of America speeches where he exhorted and encouraged his former fellow citizens to embrace a path of liberation and empowerment and hope by resisting Hitler. And it was in his 1954 remarks on the development of the hydrogen bomb and his 1961 comments against the use of atomic bombs in the Berlin Crisis of that year.[114]

Thus, on a range of occasions, Tillich mustered the philosophical, theological, and social ethical elements of his thought to stand against the forces of injustice and oppression. For this reason, his thinking can be a meaningful partner in demanding courageous action by world powers to construct

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385)." Further, "In so far as the centering and liberating elements in a structure of political power are balanced, the Kingdom of God in history has conquered fragmentarily the ambiguities of control (*ST III*, 386)."

[112] *ST III*, 388, 389. The ambiguity of historical self-creation manifests itself in the creation of the new that brings about tension between generations and provokes questions regarding the relation of the new to the interests of the new itself or those of the old that preceded it. This process may be non-revolutionary or could bring about revolution and subsequent reactions (*ST III*, 343). Tillich argued that the "rhythm of the dynamics of history" between prophetic attack and priestly conservation "(which has analogies in the biological and psychological realms) is the way in which the Kingdom of God works in history (*ST III*, 390)."

[113] *ST III*, 391. The ambiguity of historical self-transcendence can express itself if either the new or the old lifts their claims to demonic ultimacy, claiming that history has reached its apex, its intended end (*ST III*, 344-5). Instead, Tillich saw "a victory of the Kingdom of God in history if a sacramental church takes the principle of social transformation into its aim or if an activistic church pronounces the Spiritual Presence under all social conditions , emphasizing the vertical line of salvation over against the horizontal line of historical activity" (*ST III*, 391).

[114] Up to this point in the essay, the source for Tillich's thought on the nature of existence as an ambiguous context that interweaves estrangement with the New Being has been his *Systematic Theology* published in three volumes in 1951, 1957, and 1963. During the same period, Tillich delivered a 1951 lecture that rejected any claim to authority "which breaks humanity and breaks consciousness of truth." He followed this up with his important 1954 construction of love, power, and justice that draws the ontological structure for discerning when the limit of fate/finitude becomes unjust imposition. It clarifies power as the power to be (both to separate and to return), love as the reunion of the separated, and justice as that which prevents power from becoming oppressive while giving love its backbone. And in 1957, Tillich pointed to the significance of this for the life process – implying the impact of the New Being – by calling love personal holiness and justice social holiness.Paul Tillich, *The Construction of the History of Religion in Schelling's Positive Philosophy: Its Presuppositions and Principles* (1910), trans. Victor Nuovo. (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1974); *The Religious Situation*, 1926, trans. H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: Meridian, 1932); *The Socialist Decision*, 1933 (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); *Theology of Peace*, 1938-1965, ed. Ronald H. Stone (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990); „Religion und Weltpolitik," (1939) in *Die Religiöse Substanz der Kultur: Schriften zur Theologie der Kultur*, Vol. 9 of *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Renate Albrecht, 139-204 (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1967); *Against the Third Reich*, 1942-44, trans. Matthew Lon Weaver (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998); and Sarah Churchwell, *Behold America: The Entangled History of "America First" and "the American Dream"* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 246-60.

empowering approaches to confronting the demonic, strategic, and violent oppression experienced by women in Afghanistan.

Intersectionality, the New Being, and the Women of Afghanistan

In concrete ways, Paul Tillich questioned the legitimacy of any institutional behavior that brought about injustice, that violated the balance between freedom and fate in allowing fate to crush freedom, and, in doing so, served the cause of estrangement rather than that of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. In the threefold portrayal of estrangement and its corresponding to threefold the New Being in Jesus as the Christ, in its straightforward portrayal of the ambiguity of reality that makes the struggle against estrangement and injustice the inescapable marks of existence, Tillich remained the realist. In this, intersectionality finds a conceptual ally in his thought.

Kimberlé Crenshaw paints a picture that still rings true thirty-five years after she first wrote of the complexity of the multilevel discrimination that remains an ugly element within American culture to this day: an expression of this is the behavior of Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential campaign, but the pebble of hatred he dropped in the United States – blatant white male privilege – has endless rings that stretch throughout its society. The difficulties created by a judicial system that defiantly would not see the multiple manifestations of discrimination powerholders can impose, the various ways privileged women didn't "get it" when asked to consider the injustice expressed through sexual objectivization unique to women of color, and the misogyny woven into various cultural interpretations of the Black community that flipped the strength of Black women into prone to scurrilous behavior came together to offer a nonfictional story that refused just to enter the space of the vulnerable.

Yet, as much as one would like to see the relevance of the overcoming of estrangement by the New Being in Tillich's thought – and how it is relevant to all situations – and as much as one hopes that Crenshaw's sounding of the alarm of injustice will regularly awaken people to the pernicious extension of the tentacles of injustice into all cultures, we find ourselves flummoxed by the circumstances of the women of Afghanistan: yes, the estrangement; yes, the intersectionality; yes, the hope that justice will manifest itself in overt religious or bare human will; but, what now in a period in which the sound of silence is all that the women of Afghanistan hear, especially when their fate has been captive to the whims and winds of democracies with their inconstant care for their futures.

Conclusion

In his autobiography, *On the Boundary*, Tillich described his life using thirteen boundaries – seeming contradictions – he sought to walk between throughout his life. Away from the battlefields during WW I, he sought the solace of the artwork of Botticelli. When war was brewing in Europe once again, he turned to Picasso's *Guernica* for truthfulness, if not solace.

In the life of every woman in present-day Afghanistan, one would see a sketch of the picture of a crushed power of being if she had the freedom to draw it. The theoretical paths of Tillich's ontology and Crenshaw's intersectionality offer wisdom, but neither of them offers immediate solutions or conclusions in the face of oppressive, hyper-patriarchal power ruling Afghanistan and the exhausted, politically anemic powers that were part of past strategies for Afghanistan's future. Ambiguity remains as a contemporary *Guernica* in Afghanistan.

James Baldwin once argued that …if one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not

> question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected – those, precisely, who need the law's protection most! – and listens to their testimony…then you will know, not whether or not the country is just, but whether or not it has any love for justice, or any concept of it."[115]

In their ways, Tillich's estrangement and Crenshaw's intersectionality press us to surrender wishful thinking and embrace the truths about injustice throughout the world: join the cause of the realists.

[115] James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 149.

However, both plant seeds of hope: the New Being of Tillich and the possibility of reaching fuller justice in Crenshaw's intersectionality. If people of conscience throughout the world commit themselves to years-long agendas to call forth the world and regional organizations of the world to (a) pursue agendas of empowerment and justice for women around the world and (b) to act unrelentingly to challenge powerholders to end the war on women wherever it is being waged, then – in the words of Baldwin – intersectionality can be the call to nurture love of justice and, in so doing, paint pictures upon pictures of regeneration and renewal that come closer to painting the reality of the New Being.

Paul Tillich on Christianity's Claim to Absoluteness: On my edition of Paul Tillich's lectures in Stuttgart and Tübingen in 1963

Werner Schüßler

Source: Werner Schüßler (Hg.), Paul Tillich: Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums und die Weltreligionen. Edition der Vorträge Paul Tillichs in Stuttgart und Tübingen 1963, in: Christian Danz / Marc Dumas / Werner Schüßler (Eds.), The Future of Protestantism (= International Yearbook of Tillich Research 2023/2024, vol. 16), Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter 2024, pp. 185-285.

My Edition contains all the relevant texts: Tillich's Outlines (III.), the Stuttgart lecture (IV.) and the Tübingen lecture (V.), which differ from each other as he delivered the lectures freely on the basis of his outlines, and the extensive discussion that followed the Tübingen lecture (VI.), in which Ernst Bloch also took part. The edition is preceded by an introduction by the editor (I.) and an editorial report (II.). An appendix contains a short report on the two lectures (VII.) by an unknown employee of "Evangelisches Verlagswerk". The editor's extensive footnotes provide explanations and references to the edited texts and refer to parallel passages in Tillich's work.

(The Tübingen lecture and parts of the discussion following this lecture were edited for the first time in the dissertation by Jean-Marc Aveline: L'enjeu christologique en théologie des religions. Le débat Tillich - Troeltsch. Préface par Mgr Joseph Doré, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf 2003 (= Diss. Univ. Laval, Québec), 674-690 (lecture) and 690-700 (excerpt from the discussion), French translation of the lecture: 700-715. The edition is based on an audio transcription by Gudrun Steiß (cf. ibid., 673). The edition contains a number of audio errors and several blanks that could not be broken down.)

Paul Tillich dealt with questions of the history of religion quite early on, for example in his philosophical doctoral dissertation of 1910 and in an early Berlin lecture on "Philosophy of Religion" in the summer semester of 1920. But this discussion was based purely on book study. However, as he later rightly pointed out, such a study never leads beyond external knowledge, whereas an encounter with a holy person from another religion leads to completely different insights. And here the Eastern religions, with which Tillich came into contact from the 1950s onwards, should be mentioned in particular.

During his time at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, he had the opportunity to meet Daisetzu Teitaro Suzuki (1870-1966), who taught at the opposite Columbia University from 1952-1957. Suzuki is known to have popularized Zen Buddhism in Europe and the USA through his lecturing and teaching activities. And when Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1889-1980), a well-known scholar and teacher of Zen Buddhism, was a visiting professor at Harvard University in the fall of 1957, this gave Tillich the opportunity to hold three evenings of talks with him, which were recorded and published between 1971 and 1973 in the journal "The Eastern Buddhist" (Kyoto) under the title "Dialogues, East and West". For Tillich, however, a 10-week trip to Japan in 1960, where he met representatives of Shintoism and Buddhism, must undoubtedly have been of an overwhelming nature. In a short article entitled "On the Boundary Line", which he wrote in the same year for a series of articles in the magazine *The Christian Century* on the subject of "How My Mind Has Changed", Tillich emphasizes with regard to his trip to Japan that a different reality can ultimately only be revealed to us through "existential participation".

The experiences of the 1960 trip to Japan ultimately found expression in the so-called "Bampton Lectures" entitled "Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions", which Tillich held at Columbia University in New York in the fall of 1961 and which represent his most extensive examination of non-Christian religions. In this context, however, the

question of Christianity's claim to absoluteness only plays a subordinate role.

Two years later, in November and December 1963, Tillich stood in for Gerhard Ebeling in Zurich while the latter was in the USA to give lectures. He took this as an opportunity to accept various lecture invitations in West and East Germany. Two of these lectures are of particular relevance, as they explicitly deal with the question of the "claim to absoluteness of Christianity and the world religions", which Tillich had previously somewhat neglected. He gave the first lecture on this topic on December 7 in Stuttgart, the second two days later in Tübingen, where an extensive discussion ensued in which Ernst Bloch, among others, also made a lengthy statement. The two lectures were based on handwritten "outlines", so although they do not differ in substance, they do differ in terms of the individual statements. These lectures – and also the Tübingen discussion – are preserved on tape recordings, which I transcribed for the edition in the "International Yearbook for Tillich Research".

Before Tillich sets out his own position on the issue at hand, his first step is to define terms: What does "absolute" mean in this context, what does "claim" mean and: Who is making the claim and for what? "Absolute", he explains, can mean 'exclusive' or 'exclusive only' on the one hand, and 'inclusive' or 'all-encompassing' on the other. However, he rejects both possibilities for himself and would like to lead his listeners, as he puts it, to a "third possibility", according to which Christianity or something in Christianity is neither exclusive nor inclusive, but "in it is given the final criterion for all other religions as well as for Christianity itself" (see here and in the following my Edition: p. 233; translation by me!). A pluralistic position is not an option for Tillich in terms of a theology of religions, since as a theologian he clearly holds that the revelation in Jesus Christ has an irrevocable and therefore normative character.

With regard to the term "claim", according to Tillich, one can distinguish between a natural and a reflected claim. While the natural claim "is the immediate, self-evident affirmation of that in which one believes" (233), the reflected claim has gone through the contradiction; it thus presupposes an opposing claim. This distinction already makes it clear that, according to Tillich, it is not enough to say that Jesus is the Christ or the Son of God, since this is first and foremost a pure assertion that can only claim validity for itself in the internal theological space. In other words, those who hold to the central Christian dogma that Jesus is the Christ or the Son of God must be able to give an account of this statement, and that means they must be able to name criteria that justify such a statement.

The last definition concerns the question: "Who makes the claim, and for what does he make the claim?" (234) The subject here is undoubtedly Christianity. But for what does Christianity make a claim to absoluteness? According to Tillich, there are again two possible answers here: On the one hand, Christianity can make a claim to absoluteness "for itself as a concrete historical phenomenon, for itself as a religion" (234). But according to Tillich, this possibility has no longer been tenable since Ernst Troeltsch's 1902 essay on "The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions", in which he proved the construction of Christianity as an absolute religion from a historical way of thinking and by historical means to be impossible. The second possibility is that the object of the claim to absoluteness is "that which stands above religion, including Christian religion, that which stands above the church and judges the church. Namely, the event on which the Church is based and which the Church always represents only ambiguously, which, like all things in history, can be profaned and demonized and which therefore stands under the judgment of the event on which the Church is founded." (235)

Based on these definitions, Tillich comes to an initial conclusion: "The claim to absoluteness is a reflected claim, it is not the simple natural yes-saying of someone who lives in Christianity and says yes to it, but it is the reflected claim that follows from the encounter with the opposite or the other. And the claim is not made for the religion, but for the event, which is the criterion of all religions, including Christianity." (235)

How does Tillich justify this claim to absoluteness associated with Jesus as the Christ? It is crucial that there is no "standpoint outside, observing" (226) in this question, but that such things can only ever be "born out of existential participation" (247).

This insight, however, and this is of decisive importance for Tillich, in no way releases the theologian from the obligation to "formulate abstractly": "Abstract means simply in terms, namely subtracted from the concrete situations" (247). If this

were not possible, then a conversation with people of other faiths would be impossible, because "then one could only confess, but not talk to each other" (226).

So what are the criteria that, according to Tillich, are contained in the Christ event and which, by raising them to an abstract level, should also be valid in relation to other religions, even with regard to secular forms of faith? Tillich names three criteria here: firstly, "the criterion of standing in communion with God through the personal center against all moral and ascetic law", secondly, agape in the sense of Christian love, which is the criterion of all forms of human communities and "which is still effective even where the other is disagreeable, actually hateful to us", and thirdly, "self-negation, as it is not present in any other religion in this sharpness" (228), whereby this last criterion is the decisive one for Tillich.

He explains what is meant by this "self-negation" as follows: Only in the sacrifice of his finitude can Jesus the Christ make a claim to absoluteness. "He did not raise it for himself as Jesus, but for himself as the Christ." (227). This is therefore about the "self-sacrifice of that in Jesus which is only Jesus. That is, the dependence on time and space, on character and family, on tradition, even Jewish tradition, and the freedom from it that is achieved when the sacrifice is made. [...] For me," summarizes Tillich, "it is these three elements that make the Christ of the New Testament the criterion first of all of Christianity and then of all other religions and cultures." (248)

In the aforementioned "Bampton Lectures" of 1961, Tillich uses the somewhat strange-sounding term "conditional exclusiveness" for the position he referred to as the "third possibility" in the two lectures of 1963 – albeit only in a single passage. Applied to the Christ event, this means that it also transcends every particular religion, even Christianity as a religion. And in this way, it ultimately makes the exclusivity of every particular religion "conditional." This means that even Christianity as a religion is only ever a matter of "conditional exclusiveness." Conditional exclusiveness therefore means that Christianity must always place itself under the three criteria mentioned, which it can never fully meet, as a complete balance between particularity and universality, which the decisive criterion of self-negation would require, is impossible in reality. This means that all empirical claims to absoluteness or ultimate validity are always already relativized by the Christ event.

In his last lecture on "The Significance of the History of Religion for the Systematic Theologian" from 1965, Tillich argued that a Christological approach could also be gained in this way, "which could free us from many dead ends into which the discussion of Christological dogma has led the Christian churches from the beginning".

Tillich's statements in the Stuttgart and Tübingen lecture of 1963 also make it clear that the threefold scheme of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, which goes back to Alan Race in the 1980s, is extremely simplistic and actually not very helpful.

Applying Tillich's Category of Christ's Resurrection to the Buddha's *Trikaya* and Laozi's Apotheosis

Kirk R. MacGregor

In book two of *Systematic Theology*, Tillich formulated the category of Christ's resurrection to mean that the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth—body and soul—became inextricably intertwined in the experiences of his followers with the presence of the New Being. Hence the New Testament insists that Christ's resurrection deals not merely with the immortality of Jesus' soul but also includes physical elements. This paper explores the interreligious applicability of this Tillichian category's meaning to Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism and religious Daoism. In doing so, I proceed along three lines. First, I explicate the details of Tillich's category of Christ's resurrection. Second, I argue that the originally Mahayana doctrine of the *trikaya*, or the three bodies of Buddha, likewise means that the historical figure Siddharta Gautama—body and soul—became inextricably intertwined in the experiences of Mahayana Buddhists in early imperial China and of Vajrayana Buddhists since the seventh century CE with the presence of the New Being. Third, I argue that the religious Daoist doctrine of Laozi's apotheosis similarly means that the legendary figure Laozi—body and soul—became inextricably intertwined in the experiences of religious Daoists with the presence of the New Being.

The Category of Christ's Resurrection

According to Tillich, Christ's resurrection should not be understood as either the physical restoration of Jesus' body or the immortality of Jesus' soul.[116] This is because Christ's resurrection transcends these polarities, possessing, in Tillich's words, "the character of spiritual presence."[117] Tillich held that during Jesus' life, his followers encountered "the power of his being…as the power of the New Being."[118] Tillich defined New Being as "essential being under the conditions of existence…without being conquered by them" and "conquering the gap between essence and existence."[119] Accordingly, Tillich explained the quality of the disciples' encounter of Jesus: "To experience the New Being in Jesus as the Christ means to experience the power in him which has conquered existential estrangement in himself and in everyone who participates in him."[120] When Jesus was crucified, however, it seemed to his disciples that he could not have incarnated the New Being because the New Being, by definition, defeats any exiting of the present plus recession into the past. Tillich posited that this paradoxical situation generated profound cognitive dissonance in Jesus' original followers, which would spark a liminal breakthrough.[121]

This liminal breakthrough enabled Jesus' followers to experience Jesus as the reality of God. Tillich described what happened in that breakthrough:

> In an ecstatic experience the concrete picture of Jesus of Nazareth became indissolubly united with the reality of the New Being. He is present whenever the New Being is present. Death was not able to push him into the past…In this way the concrete individual life of the man Jesus of Nazareth is raised above transitoriness into the eternal presence of God as Spirit.[122]

For Tillich, Christ's resurrection is the real spiritual event of the timeless, permanent unification of the historical Jesus—namely, "the reappearance of the total personality, which includes the bodily expression of his being"—with the New Being.[123] Tillich maintained that this event first grasped Jesus' disciples, over 500 of Jesus' followers at one time, and Paul, and continues to grasp persons in every subsequent generation. Accordingly, everyone in the past, present, and future who is grasped by the "living presence" of Jesus experiences Christ's resurrection.[124] Since this event restored Jesus in the minds of his disciples to the status of the Christ, Tillich denominated it "the restitution theory" of Christ's resurrection.[125]

Applying Tillich's Resurrection Category to the Buddha's Trikaya

In Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, the doctrine of the *trikaya*, or three bodies of Buddha, maintains that the being of the historical Siddharta Gautama was not exhausted by the eighty years of his earthly life. As Buddhism became a missionary religion, the Theravada insistence that Siddharta Gautama was merely a human being who experienced enlightenment and then taught others the path to this enlightenment failed to satisfy the prevalent religious consciousness in China, where Buddhist monks were preaching in the first century CE.[126] Indigenous Chinese religions like Confucianism and Daoism focused in various forms on ontological commitments, where being-itself was conceived as either social harmony or the way of nature.[127] But neither Confucianism nor Daoism, in the first century CE, tied their ontological commitments to their founder. Buddhist monks saw that tying their ontological commitment to enlightenment, which for our purposes may be treated as synonymous

[116] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. in 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 2:155–57.

[117] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:157.

[118] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:157.

[119] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:118, 94; 2:118–19.

[120] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:125.

[121] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:156–57.

[122] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:157.

[123] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:157, 156.

[124] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:157.

[125] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:157, 158.

[126] Michael Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 140, Hillary Rodrigues, "Buddhism," in Thomas A. Robinson and Hilary Rodriguez, ed., *World Religions: A Guide to the Essentials* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 194.

[127] Duncan S. Ferguson, *Exploring the Spirituality of the World Religions: The Quest for Personal, Spiritual and Social Transformation* (London: Continuum, 2010), 124–27.

with nirvana,[128] to Siddharta Gautama himself would provide a competitive advantage for Buddhism in the religious marketplace of ideas. For one difficulty, both historically and presently, for ordinary people to grasp the concept of being is that it seems distant, remote, and depersonalized. But by wedding nirvana to Siddharta Gautama, nirvana becomes a deeply personal reality, which possesses the capacity to satisfy an individual's religious longing.

As a result, Buddhist monks formulated the *trikaya* doctrine, which made Siddharta Gautama's power of being the power of nirvana. According to this doctrine, the Buddha was not merely the enlightened one but the nature of enlightenment itself, in which anyone could participate. The first of the Buddha's three bodies was the *nirmanakaya*, or earthly, flesh and blood body of Siddharta Gautama. Just as the Christ was for Tillich ontologically superior to the historical Jesus who bore it and whose being would in the resurrection become tied to it, so the Buddha is for Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism ontologically superior to the historical Siddharta Gautama who bore it and whose being would in the *trikaya* become tied to it. Consequently, the Buddha was thought to personalize itself by achieving one of its many transformations, namely, Siddharta Gautama's physical body. This body was therefore a transformation body, the literal meaning of *nirmanakaya*.[129] Since the nature of enlightenment just is the Buddha, Siddharta Gautama was deemed to have possessed the Buddha nature. In this way, Buddhahood was transformed from an epistemological reality into an ontological one.[130]

The second of the three bodies of Buddha permanently elevates the physical reality of Siddharta Gautama with ultimate reality, just as the resurrection does for the physical reality of Jesus of Nazareth. This body of Buddha is known as the *sambhogakaya*, or body of bliss, in which form the concrete part of Siddharta Gautama's being now subsides. The body of bliss corporally experiences the joy of enlightenment in a pure land.[131] Interestingly, later forms of Buddhism would posit that there are other *sambhogakaya* besides the exalted Siddharta Gautama, the most famous of which is Amida in Pure Land Buddhism. Amida's *nirmanakaya* was the legendary monk Dharmākarā.[132] In *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*, Tillich treated nirvana as functionally equivalent to, though distinct from, the Kingdom of God: "In the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism two telos-formulas can be used: in Christianity the telos of every*one* and everything united in the Kingdom of God; in Buddhism the telos of every*thing* and everyone fulfilled in the Nirvana."[133] We recall that in *Systematic Theology* Tillich maintained the Kingdom of God was the first-century Jewish symbol for New Being.[134] From this it follows that nirvana—the cessation and conquest of all suffering even amidst the material world which gives rise to that suffering—serves as the Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist symbol for New Being. Since the *sambhogakaya* links the physical side of Siddharta Gautama with the joy that fulfills it, the *sambhogakaya* links what Siddharta Gautama was (spacetime reality) with what he should be (ultimate reality). In Tillichian terms, it links the physicality of Siddharta Gautama's existential being with his essential being, causing Siddharta Gautama's physicality to transcend this distinction.[135]

The spirituality of Siddharta Gautama's existential being is united with his essential being in the third and highest of the three bodies of Buddha, the *dharmakaya* (body of truth/essence). The body of truth/essence simply is being-itself, or the absolute which transcends the distinction between existence

[128] This approximation works for our purposes since, in Molloy's words, "the Buddha is said to have 'entered nirvana' at the time of his enlightenment" (*Experiencing*, 139).

[129] Molloy, *Experiencing*, 152.

[130] Guang Xing, *The Concept of the Buddha: Its Evolution from Early Buddhism to the Trikāya Theory*, RoutledgeCurzon Critical Studies in Buddhism (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 181.

[131] Kirk R. MacGregor, *A Comparative Study of Adjustments to Social Catastrophes in Christianity and Buddhism: The Black Death in Europe and the Kamakura Takeover in Japan as Causes of Religious Reform* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2011), 18–19; Molloy, *Experiencing*, 152–53.

[132] A full discussion of Amida and Pure Land Buddhism is found in MacGregor, *Comparative Study*, 50–51, 120–332.

[133] Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*, Fortress Texts in Modern Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 40; emphasis original.

[134] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:98; 3:108.

[135] See Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:121 for a precisely parallel description of the being of Jesus of Nazareth.

and nonexistence. Since being-itself pulsates throughout everyone and everything that exists, even the whole universe, and being-itself is the highest body of Buddha, two very important consequences follow.[136] First, the nature of the Buddha, and thus of Siddharta Gautama, is equated with being-itself. Second, all persons, as participating in being-itself, already possess the Buddha nature, making the goal of the religious quest tapping into the Buddha nature one already has.[137] When a person does this, they are, in Tillich's words, "identical with everything that is in Nirvana."[138] Because nirvana is the Mahayana and Vajrayana symbol for New Being, a person becomes identical with, and so participates in, New Being through the three bodies of Buddha. Likewise, Tillich pointed out that "it is the certainty of one's own victory over the death of existential estrangement which creates the certainty of the Resurrection of the Christ as event and symbol."[139] The *trikaya* experience emerged as a prominent characteristic of Mahayana Buddhism in early imperial China. Although subsequent Mahayana Buddhists would focus more on the Buddha as an epistemological than an ontological reality, the *trikaya* experience became a centerpiece of Vajrayana Buddhism from its inception, a status which remains to the present.[140] For these reasons, the *trikaya* doctrine should be regarded as analogous to Tillich's category of Christ's resurrection. Indeed both categories accomplish Tillich's benchmark for the status of a higher religion, enabling persons to participate in "the two elements of the experience of the holy—the experience of the holy as being and the experience of the holy as what ought to be."[141]

Applying Tillich's Resurrection Category to Laozi's Apotheosis

Probably in response to the *trikaya* doctrine, religious Daoism evolved a threefold doctrine of the Dao known as the Three Pure Ones by the end of the second century CE.[142] This personalized the ground of being, so making it more accessible to the Chinese laity. According to the doctrine, Laozi now exists as the deity Daode Tianzun, or "Way-and-Its-Power Celestial One," alongside the deities Yuanshi Tianzun ("Primal Celestial One") and Lingbao Tianzun ("Precious Celestial One").[143] There exists a hierarchical relationship between these three gods, where Yuanshi Tianzun is the heavenly Dao, Lingbao Tianzun is the earthly Dao who learned from the heavenly Dao, and Daode Tianzun is the incarnation of the Dao as Laozi, who learned from the earthly Dao and is now exalted.[144] This apotheosis of the legendary Laozi is rooted in earlier stories about Laozi's travels from China to India back to China and bodily ascension to heaven. Paralleling the early reports of Jesus' resurrection, Laozi allegedly appeared to various individuals and was thereafter regarded as deity.[145] As in Tillich's concept of Christ's resurrection, Daode Tianzun therefore captures the entire personality of Laozi, physical and spiritual.

According to the Three Pure Ones doctrine, Daode Tianzun is one with the Dao and shares in the power and being of the Dao. This observation captures the spirit of the late second-century CE work *On the Transformation of Laozi*:

> Laozi rests in the great beginning, Wanders in the great origin, Floats through dark, numinous emptiness…. He joins serene darkness before its opening, Is present in original chaos before the beginnings of time. Beyond harmony of the pure and turbid, Moving along with great initiation, He resides in the ancient realm of obscurity and vastness…. Alone and without relation, He has existed since before heaven and earth. Living deeply hidden, he always returns to be: Gone, the primordial; Present, a man!... After living for a long time…He strode on a white deer and has not returned to this day. Laozi is The utmost essence of spontaneous nature, The true root of

[136] MacGregor, *Comparative Study*, 18–19.

[137] MacGregor, *Comparative Study*, 55; Molloy, *Experiencing*, 151.

[138] Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter*, 43.

[139] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:155.

[140] I am indebted to Benjamin Chicka for this insight. See Reginald A. Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), 13, 116–17, 284.

[141] Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter*, 36–37.

[142] Molloy, *Experiencing*, 229.

[143] Julia Ching, "East Asian Religions," in Willard G. Oxtoby, ed., *World Religions: Eastern Traditions*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 393.

[144] Ching, "East Asian Religions," 392.

[145] Molloy, *Experiencing*, 219–20.

> the Tao, The father and mother of the teaching, The foundation of heaven and earth, The starting point of all life.[146]

As Livia Kohn observes, "Just as God in Christianity creates the world, so in medieval Daoism the world is actively created by Laozi or Lord Lao as the *Dao* and maintained by him throughout."[147]

Notably, the two other divine forms of the Dao, with whom the exalted Laozi is permanently united, represent the numinous Dao (Yuashi Tianzun) and its earthly, social power to overcome all current obstacles (Lingbao Tianzun). These two forms collectively represent, in Tillich's language, "essential being under the conditions of existence…without being conquered by them" and "conquering the gap between essence and existence."[148] In other words, these two forms of the Dao represent New Being. Kohn notes that here "the transcendent deity" is said to "first go beyond itself to create something embodied, then maintain this embodiment without being lost within it."[149] It consequently follows that Laozi's apotheosis timelessly unifies his being with New Being, such that Laozi's apotheosis stands as the religious Daoist functional equivalence of Tillich's category of Christ's resurrection. This reasoning is confirmed by Laozi's aforementioned description as "beyond harmony of the pure and turbid" and "the utmost essence of spontaneous nature." Just as Tillich's category of Christ's resurrection deifies Jesus while timelessly preserving his concreteness, so Laozi's apotheosis, in Kohn's words, gives him "all the powers and aspects of a transcendent god, standing above and beyond the forces of the universe and producing creation by his will. Nonetheless, this deity is still also the *Dao* and as such in his/its totality embodied in the creation."[150]

Conclusion

This piece has employed Tillich to further the causes of religious pluralism and comparative theology he anticipated in *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*. There he explains the advantages for systematic theology afforded by the history of religions. One such advantage is its phenomenological method, which exposes the potential connections between the doctrines of various world religions.[151] This approach reveals that Tillich's category of Christ's resurrection may be fruitfully applied to the Mahayana and Vajrayana *trikaya* doctrine and the religious Daoist doctrine of Laozi's apotheosis. For, like Christ's resurrection, the *trikaya* and Laozi's apotheosis permanently unite the founder, whether historical or legendary, of each respective tradition with being-itself as it enters the created order without being compromised and while triumphing over its negativities, namely, with what Tillich called New Being.

Paul Tillich and The Theological Interpretation of Capitalism in The Age of The Fourth Industrial Revolution

Julius Trugenberger

Introduction

This paper identifies Tillich's contribution to a theological interpretation and assessment of the fourth industrial revolution.[152] The development is rapid and disruptive, and both to an unprecedented degree. The recent improvement of generative artificial intelligence is only the most prominent example. It shows us that today's high-tech industry is challenging our self-image as uniquely productive beings, a self-image that has been one of the most important links between Christian and humanist tradition since the Renaissance. At present, there is

[146] *On the Transformation of Laozi*, in Steven T. Katz, ed., *Comparative Mysticism: An Anthology of Original Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 489–90.

[147] Livia Kohn, "Embodiment and Transcendence in Medieval Daoism," in Roman Malek, ed., *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ, Volume 1*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series L/1 (New York: Routledge, 2020), 69.

[148] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:118, 94; 2:118–19.

[149] Kohn, "Embodiment and Transcendence," 71.

[150] Kohn, "Embodiment and Transcendence," 71.

[151] Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter*, 76–77.

[152] There is only little literature concerning the potential of Tillich's theology in this new field. New volumes to the topic identify a wide range of issues to which theology can and must contribute but mostly without referring to Tillich's theology. However, one of the pioneers in the theological engagement with robotics, Anne Foerst, constantly integrates Tillich in her argument. Cf. Foerst, A.: *God in the Machine*.

much evidence for the assumption that the idea of God as an intimate partner of our mind and creativity is vanishing, while at the same time intelligent computers, robots and self-learning machines are developing cognitive and creative capacities that far surpass ours. Consequently, a significant number of people in the higher developed parts of the world fear that in the long run large parts of the machine world will turn former partnerships into rivalry.

Even if today nobody can seriously judge the likeliness of such a scenario, theology is obliged to make its own interpretation offer regarding the current mega-trends within the industrialized nations. Since its beginnings in the 18th and 19th century, capitalist culture with its many technological shifts has changed the way our world looks.[153] It has created new forms of life and has forced old ones to disappear, thus deeply influencing the outer circumstances under which Christian faith must prove its truth. As Christianity locates the action and revelation of God and his Spirit within history and not on a level above it, it is in its own interest to understand the signs of our times and to discern in them Law and Gospel, commandments and promises. Complete independency from the general course of events cannot be an option for Christianity unless one conceives it as an ahistoric and world-less religion in the sense of a pure mysticism.

That Paul Tillich can contribute a lot to a theological interpretation of our time with its rapid technological development is the basic thesis in this essay. It may be true that he himself has now become "history" and that he lived through an earlier phase of the capitalist age in which not Artificial Intelligence but space travelling represented humankind's latest technological achievement. Nonetheless, it can be shown that Tillich's theological interpretation of capitalist dynamics, both from his Weimar and his American work period, was "classic" in such a positive way that his ideas turn out to be still relevant for us today in our search of a reflected Christian standpoint concerning the fourth industrial Revolution

With the general claims of this essay in mind, we can now finish the introduction remarks by a short hint at what follows next: Two steps are to be made: In the first paragraph, I will give a short reconstruction of an insider's view of the fourth industrial revolution by referring to the book *The Coming Wave* of British AI specialist and tech-pioneer Mustafa Suleyman. In the second paragraph, I will return to Tillich and demonstrate how he can help us to bring a theological dimension and awareness in Suleyman's analysis.

The Coming Wave: Capitalism in the age of the fourth industrial revolution

Many vibrant contributions to our discussion field come from influential public intellectuals and popular scientists – such as Yuval Noah Harari[154] or Ray Kurzweil[155] who are only the most famous ones. The one I am referring to is Mustafa Suleyman, a British AI technologist and pioneer. His 2023 book *The Coming Wave*[156] does not only share many perspectives with the influential writings of Harrari on information and data technology; it is also particularly apt for being read with a Tillichian lens as Suleyman has at least two characteristics with Tillich in common: he is not interested in isolated discussions of specialists, he rather tries to synthesize them in order to obtain a "big picture" of what is taking place at the moment and of how very disparate phenomena interrelate. And similarly to Tillich, the ultimate goal of his interpretation of the latest trends in the capitalist world is to address the social-cultural responsibility of the readers. They are supposed not only to take note of how our Lebenswelt is changing but also to seek an active role in shaping the future of it in a way that is to all our benefit. In fact, the old *bonum commune* tradition plays a paramount role for Suleyman. He unfolds its meaning for today in the context of what he names the challenge of "containment"[157].

What is meant by this becomes clear against the background of the title-giving picture of the "wave".

[153] Cf. Osterhammel, J: *Die Verwandlung der Welt*.

[154] Harari, Y. N.: *Nexus*.

[155] Kurzweil, Ray: *The Singularity is Nearer*. To Kurzweil's theory cf. Krüger, O.: *Virtual Immortality*, 103–105.

[156] Suleyman, M: *The Coming Wave*.

[157] Whereas the first chapter begins with the statement that "containment is not possible", the books ends in chapter 13 and 14 with the claim that "containment must be possible" and with "ten steps toward containment".

Suleyman considers the fourth industrial revolution as being driven by two leading technologies – Artificial Intelligence and synthetic biology. As we already experienced, both are open to misuse so that a big wave of risks and problems is tiding up in front of us right now. If we succeed in containing the inherent risks and moral problems of AI and synthetic biology, we will benefit from the wave in that it will carry us to unseen productivity rates, to immense progress in automatization and to new dimensions of welfare. If we do not succeed in containing the risks our world as we know it so far could perish completely.

With this dualistic scenario in mind, we can now go a bit into the details.

Suleyman argues that inventions from former periods of the history of capitalism had mostly to do with the expansion of human power over atoms. The manipulation of raw matter stood in the centre during the first and the second industrial revolution. It was only in the mid twentieth century that technology began to operate on a higher level of abstraction. Back then, information started to replace atoms as new central building block of inventions. Today most technological devices are valuable not because of their raw matter but rather for the complex information stored. And the more important the computational base is, the clearer this fact becomes. We life in a world in which information characterises the arrangement of atoms, thus deciding whether something is desirable and economically valuable or not.[158]

If we couple this insight from the information era that begun in the 1970s and 1980s with the latest development around AI and AI-based manufacturing, we will see the immense dynamics in these trends and we will get an idea of both its positive and negative aspects. Today computers do not only store and retrieve information as these machines have been doing for the last decades. They are now about to deal with them in an intelligent, humanoid manner. According to many experts such as my reference Mustafa Suleyman, this specific progress has the power to change the future reality of work fundamentally. AI-based manufacturing will make it possible to design, manipulate and manufacture real-world products with only a small human work force but at the same time with much greater speed, precision, and inventiveness than ever before. As a result, Suleyman says, the future progress of AI and its manufacturing techniques will cause serious struggles between those who fear to be substituted by machines and those who succeed in making profit from raising productivity rates. *Humans need not apply* – this book title of American computer scientist Jerry Kaplan[159] expresses the possible scenario in a nutshell.

The consequences of the rapid progress of intelligent biology seem to be even more complicated. Here life itself and not just issues of social justice and the bonum commune is at stake.

Briefly and with Suleyman speaking, synthetic biology means the implementation of machine-triggered self-learning processes into organic contexts.[160] Again, the starting point for this mega trend lies in the mid of the 20th century: the discovery of the structure of the DNA opened the door for modern genetic research and genetic therapy by revealing how absolutely central information for the shaping of organic life processes are. If we recall that current computers are doing much better than we do in intelligent information management we begin to see how well the current computational progress suits the needs of modern genetic research. There is at least, one very new trend in this context that should not be left unmentioned: new attempts of *DNA printing* or *editing*. Here researchers use generative AI to design never-before-seen regulatory elements in the DNA sequence. As experts explain, an "AI-designed synthetic DNA can switch on genes only in specific kinds of cells in the body."[161] This could be extremely helpful for different sorts of genetic therapy. According to some very optimistic experts, severe diseases such as Alzheimer, for which evolution so far has not been able to provide a good cellular driver for an appropriate drug, could disappear in some decades if humankind makes further progress in the implementation of generative AI in genetics and biochemistry.

[158] Cf. Suleyman, *The Coming Wave*, 54–56.

[159] Kaplan, J: *Humans need not apply*.

[160] Cf. Suleyman, *The Coming Wave*, 79–91.

[161] https://medicine.yale.edu/news-article/generative-ai-designs-dna-sequences-to-switch-genes-on-and-off/ (last access: 27. November 2024)

Suleyman himself mentions a couple of positive effects that synthetic biology in the form of AI-based DNA-printing can deliver: it could help us to create "viruses that produce batteries, proteins that purify dirty water, organs grown in vats, algae that draw down carbon from the atmosphere, plants that consume toxic waste"[162] – and so on. At the same time, severe risks and dangers continue to exist that must not be ignored. Today, it is already possible to get a DNA profile of an individual from a private company for a few hundred euros. What will happen if private companies offer DNA printers for a few hundred euros? Private DNA synthesises would make it possible for anyone with only little knowledge about proteins to begin experiments with life designing. The danger is evident on a level of microbes and viruses: Dictators and warlords could fill up their arsenals with lethal biochemical weapons that nobody can control and contain any more. Suleyman himself sums up the ambiguity by emphasising that everything depends on a) the purposes for which each individual uses the new technological possibilities, and b) whether we – humanity – create a motivating context for the peaceful use of the new technologies – a challenge we can only meet "with a wave of committed new movements, businesses and governments."[163] As we easily see, this is an ethical approach that is classical in its character. It now gives us the opportunity to turn to Paul Tillich to deepen the argument.

Paul Tillich's theology and the possibility of spiritual orientation in the age of the fourth industrial revolution

I will now unfold Tillich's contribution to the questions raised by Suleyman, and I will do so by referring back to his idea and concept of technology. It contains all the elements we need for a differentiated theological position on the current mega-trends.

Tillich discussed the question of what the essence of technology and progress is and how they are embedded in capitalist culture not only during his time in America. Although the third volume of his late *Systematic theology*[164] offers us a very concise scheme concerning these issues, we already find first attempts to clarify them in his early cultural theological writings from the Weimar Republic era. In the specific context of his theology of technology, there is much continuity between both Tillich's German and his American work period; in fact, there is more continuity here than the severe changes in Tillich's theological systems suggest.

The Weimar Tillich was already aware of the fact that technology is at the centre of capitalist culture, insofar as it is one of the main factors of economic growth along with the exploitation of human labour and of natural resources. The Dresden essay *Mythos und Logos der Technik* from 1928[165] for example clearly shows us that technology offers possibilities for economic growth by enabling human beings to transcend themselves. The essence of technology is to help humanity to transcend our organic limits.[166] Even the first self-invented tools of the Stone Age represented progress in the original sense of the word, derived from the Latin verb *pro-gredi*, which basically means to advance from an unsatisfactory situation to a more comfortable one. For Tillich there was no doubt that if religion forbade this movement, it would turn against the very essence of humanity.[167] Progress is a basic human need, especially in the context of comfort, and capitalism is the form of culture that takes this insight most seriously.[168]

But Tillich would not be Tillich if he did not believe that every major factor in cultural history is, above all, ambiguous. There are at least two facts that reflect the ambiguity of technological progress under capitalist conditions. First, this progress is always both constructive and destructive. While it creates new forms and possibilities of life, it also makes old ones disappear, namely those that are no longer profitable. In this respect, our history of progress has a long list of losses, and it is highly probable that a contemplative religious attitude

[162] Suleyman, *The Coming Wave*, 84f.

[163] Cf. Suleyman, *The Coming Wave*, 278.

[164] Tillich, P.: *Systematic Theology III*, 333–339.

[165] Tillich, P.: *Logos und Mythos der Technik*.

[166] Cf. Tillich, *Logos und Mythos der Technik*, 301.

[167] Cf. Schüßler, W.: *Paul Tillich zur Zweideutigkeit des Fortschritts*, 243–245.

[168] Cf. Tillich, P.: *The Courage to Be*, 103–112. Here, Tillich describes modern capitalist culture in America under its dominant aspect: the pursuit of economic progress is central with everyone being asked to participate in capitalism as an endless history of progress.

stands at its top.[169] Secondly, this progress as such has no final goal and offers no final perspective from which to oversee it. Nevertheless, it must go on – and it must go on so quickly that it becomes self-sustaining. The third volume of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* takes this self-referential structure of progress in economic contexts very seriously. We learn here that one of the great ambiguities of modern life is that every new technology creates new needs, and every invention triggers further research for further inventions.[170] Trying to stop the innovation machine from the outside would be nothing more than an arbitrary act that underestimates the inherent dynamics of life.[171]

I think that Suleyman's books show us how striking Tillich's reflections on the phenomenological level still are. AI, synthetic biology and all the major applications around them realise a fundamental feature of Tillich's concept of technology. They all help us to expand our horizons of meaningful cultural activity – and they do so in a way that ties in with our inherited limitations. As natural intelligences, we have a very limited capacity to manage large amounts of information intelligently and creatively. Our intelligence is generally tied to the biological limits within which our organism exists; not to forget the cultural customs from which our intelligence capacities depend as well.[172] Today's technological pioneers are trying to overcome these limitations mainly through inventions of new interface models between the human body and mind on the one side, and computer software, robots, and artificially enhanced organisms on the other. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that there is a major problem in this context that is as relevant as never before. Saying it in categories of Tillich's criticism: There are too many technological possibilities that are realised before the question of their deeper meaning and purpose is discussed. Tillich himself warned his readers that "if possibilities become purposes only because there are possibilities, the true meaning of purpose is lost."[173] Then more and more things are invented without any reference to higher goals while there is only little occasion to develop deliberate answers with regard to the risks and consequences of the new inventions.

Even if Tillich, all in all, might constantly have tended to overestimate the possibilities of imposing higher cultural purposes to market processes, his attempts to establish a reflexive distance from any quasi-religious worship of technological progress have not lost actuality at all. In particular, Tillich's metaphorical distinction, developed in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology*, between the horizontal progress of capitalist culture and the vertical axe that orients the religions, especially Christianity, still points to the importance of the religious perspective in contemporary debates on the chances and risks of new technologies. According to our theologian and put in a simple way, religious life is interested in movements of vertical self-transcendence, while capitalism understands transcendence primarily in a horizontal sense. When the vertical dimension comes into play, our common concepts of progress as a simple *pro-gredi* on a horizontal level are challenged. Religious life may not completely reject the pro-gredi scheme, but it does raise the question of whether or not new developments and achievements within human culture contribute to the fulfilment of our finite existence. As a neo-idealist theologian, Tillich always believed that progress in religious contexts is essentially a transition from immaturity to maturity, from coercion and alienation to freedom, from Law to Gospel, from an outwardly directed character to a

[169] *Loss* as a basic category of modern life experience is currently being rediscovered by German sociology; cf. Reckwitz, A.: Verlust.

[170] Tillich does not give a detailed analysis of this self-referentiality. However, he points to the phenomenon of the "gadget", which is an only playful invention that is produced due to the logic of the market and whose primary purpose is not the improvement of life conditions. As Tillich interpreted the whole American post-war economy of the 1950ies and 190ies as driven by gadget-production, his Systematic Theology raises the question of when "[t]he divine Spirit, cutting out of the vertical direction to resist an unlimited running-ahead in the horizontal line, drives toward a technical production that is subjected to the ultimate end of all life processes – Eternal Life" (Tillich, *Systematic Theology III*, 259).

[171] Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology III*, 74: "But it is not possible to change this by simply saying: Do not continue production! This is as impossible as saying to the scientist, with respect to the ambiguity of freedom and limitation: Do not continue research! Ambiguities cannot be overcome by cutting off an element which essentially belongs to the process of the self-creation of life."

[172] Cf. for this dimension Huber, W.: *Menschen, Götter und Maschinen*, 128f.

[173] Tillich, P.: *Systematic Theology III*, 62.

self-responding one open to divine inspiration.[174] If we follow him and make these categories and the special understanding of progress underlying them central to our theological assessment of technological developments, we will immediately begin to raise questions usually unheard in the current debate:

What applications of AI and synthetic biology increase our confidence in ourselves as responsible subjects capable of acting morally, and what applications decrease it? What applications will allow us to come to terms with our finite and fragmentary existence? What does it mean to humanize technological inventions and to speak of machines in anthropomorphic terms and where does deification begin? In what way can life be enhanced technologically so that the divine Spirit can still reveal Himself as the true perfecter of our lives? Tillich never saw any need to reject technological progress as such. But he insisted that the fruits of this progress absolutely central for human flourishing must be integrated into the ultimate meaning of our lives. This ultimate meaning is always there, and it is not in a paradoxical simultaneity so that there is no need for theology to identify the pursuit of technological and economic progress with it.

Now that we have reached the theoretical climax, we can conclude with a final and brief remark on the question of containment, which Mustafa Suleyman raised in his *The Coming Wave*. The British intellectual is sceptical about humanity's ability to contain the risks and dangers of AI and synthetic biology. These are emerging technologies, which means that they will have consequences that no one can foresee and predict by observing their beginnings. It seems clear that any spiritual help is welcome in this situation. What we can learn from Tillich's concept of revelation and the way it is related to history is that the future is always open to new, surprising manifestations of the Kingdom that no one has yet thought of. It is not without reason that one of the key words in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology* is Kairos. The word Kairos stands not least for the right time to act that usually comes quite unexpectedly – as a result of God's revelatory activity. Since it also implies the possibility that our historical situation changes fundamentally, it is perhaps the most appropriate concept which we have in theology for the containment debate.

Bringing the Ultimate back to the therapist's couch: Tillich and the Relational Spirituality Model

Rev. Kristen R. Hydinger

This paper highlights the ways the Relational Spirituality Model (RSM) utilizes Paul Tillich's understandings of ultimate reality and ultimate concern to engage anxiety in the mental health setting. First, some context is provided on the tense relationship between psychology and religiously- or spiritually-linked existential concerns, followed by a summary of Tillich's contribution to this conversation, and concludes with how the RSM offers a more nuanced take to integrating a client's religious or spiritual beliefs within the bounds of therapeutic mental health treatment.

Psychology and religion's tense relationship

For much of psychology's history, a client's engagement with the ultimate was kept separate or even exclusively understood as a hindrance to the psychological treatment plan, especially if engaged through traditional religious symbols. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Sigmund Freud (1974) viewed religion as "the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity"

[174] Cf. for example Tillich, P: *Systematic Theology III*, 362–374 (The Dynamics of History and the New Being). Tillich writes there: "Mankind hat to mature to a point in which the centre of history could appear and be received as the centre. This maturing process is working in all history, but a particular development was necessary in order to prepare for Him in whom the final revelation would occur. This is the function of the development of which the Old Testament is the document. The Old Testament manifestations of the Kingdom of God produced the direct preconditions for its final manifestation in the Christ. The maturity was reached; the time was fulfilled. This happened once in the original revelatory and saving stretch of history, but it happens again wherever the centre is received as centre" (365). Tillich suggests interpreting "the fulfilment of time as the moment of maturity in a particular religious and cultural development – adding, however, the warning that maturity means not only the ability to receive the central manifestation of the Kingdom of God but also the greatest power to resist it. For maturity is the result of education by the law, and in some who take the law with radical seriousness, maturity becomes despair of the law, with the ensuing quest for that which breaks through the law as "good news" (370).

(Freud, p. 71) capable of being "cleared up" through psychoanalysis lest a human never grow to full psychological maturity. This perspective espoused early in the development of psychology as a discipline has permeated much of mental health training to date. In fact, some training programs teach that in-depth discussions of a client's religious or spiritual framework are beyond the scope of the mental health practitioner's professional responsibility. Yet in the 2017 version of the American Psychological Association code of ethics, respect, openness, and cultural sensitivity to the client's spiritual or religious orientation are named as mandatory for ethical clinical practice. One could make the argument that a mental health provider who redirects a client away from engaging their spiritual self during a session is a little less than open, especially when the clinical concern at hand is intertwined with religious communities, religious experiences, or particular theologies.

In light of APA's 2017 ethics code, some clinicians have recommended practices removed from their theological or philosophical context. Clinicians are hoping these practices can appeal to, if not all, at least most patients without espousing a particular ideology. For example, meditation, mindfulness, or yoga often are recommended as, presumably, religiously neutral practices that can help reduce a client's stress. There are studies that show how engaging in each of these practices can reduce feelings of stress and anxiety at a surface level. Yet such recommendations still permit the therapist to abstain from engaging the depths of how the client relates to the ultimate inside the therapy session. In other words, recommending external self-care practices but never making space in sessions to reflect on what those practices reveal for the client does not actually coincide with the APA's ethics code. Without this integration, the client's meaning making systems are still bypassed, likely hindering their abilities to engage and move beyond their anxiety. Anxiety has to do with discomfort around what no one can know about the future and many religious and spiritual traditions have spent centuries writing, teaching, preaching, and evangelizing different versions of beliefs and theories aimed at ameliorating discomfort around that future-oriented mystery. Additionally, encouraging practices without context risks ignoring the cultural history of the practice, including religious or philosophical roots, increasing the likelihood of at least cultural insensitivity if not cultural appropriation. This common approach by mental health providers is likely revealing of anxieties inherent among many psychology professionals worthy of its own therapeutic unpacking.

Tillich and anxiety

While Freud's approach has been pervasive, even among his contemporaries it was not the only perspective that put psychology and religion in conversation with each other. In the simplest of examples, psychologist and Reform minister Carl Jung felt people engaged religion to navigate the unknown. While not a traditionally religious person himself, psychologist and philosopher William James felt religious beliefs offered valuable insight about a client to the psychologist. Similarly, and not too many years later, Paul Tillich offered a different understanding of religion and psychology. In a footnote of Volume 1 of *Systematic Theology*, Tillich says "Psychotherapy cannot remove ontological anxiety, because it cannot change the structure of finitude" (p. 191). This is not an indictment on the discipline of psychology implying it should be cast aside altogether. In fact, in *The Courage to Be*, Tillich describes how therapists and religious leaders' augmentation of each other's work benefits the patient. In regard to working through existential anxiety, Tillich says,

> Therefore the ministerial function comprehends both itself and the medical function. Neither of these functions is absolutely bound to those who exercise it professionally. The physician, especially the psychotherapist, can implicitly communicate courage to be and the power of taking existential anxiety upon oneself. He does not become a minister in doing so and he never should try to replace the minister, but he can become a helper to ultimate self-affirmation, thus performing a ministerial function. Conversely the minister or anyone else can become a medical helper. He does not become a physician and no minister should aspire to become one *as* a minister although he may radiate healing power for mind and body and help to remove neurotic anxiety. (Tillich, p. 68)

This "helper to ultimate self-affirmation" (Tillich, p.68) of the client includes the existential engagement of the client's relationship to ultimate reality or their ultimate concern. In other words, Tillich calls the modern-day discipline of psychology to reorient how it formulates treatment goals and

interventions, especially in regard to anxiety, one of the most common issues for which people seek mental health treatment. Rather than viewing anxiety as something to permanently overcome, Tillich asserts anxiety is inherent to the human condition: "Finitude in awareness is anxiety" (Tillich, p. 191, Vol. 1). A therapist employing a Tillichean lens sees a treatment goal to be that of the capacity to move through and in spite of the unknowable. The clinician is not striving to help a client eliminate anxiety by pretending to have landed on a sure, definite, answer to something that actually cannot be known. Comfort with the uncomfortable is the goal.

The Relational Spirituality Model

The Relational Spirituality Model (RSM) is a theoretical model of depth-oriented relational psychotherapy that uses a dual factor approach to mental health treatment. Dozens of papers investigate its application in a variety of settings, but the model is best spelled out in the 2020 book *Relational Spirituality in Psychotherapy: Healing Suffering and Promoting Growth* by Steven Sandage, David Rupert, George Stavros, and Nancy Devor. Of this approach to psychotherapy, Tillich says, "Depth psychology attributes healing powers to insight, meaning not a detached knowledge or psychoanalytic theory or of one's own past in the light of this theory but a repetition of one's actual experiences with all the pains and horrors of such a return. Insight in this sense is a reunion with one's own past and especially with those moments in it which influences the present destructively" (Tillich, p. 96, Vol. 1). The RSM plumbs these depths by also utilizing attachment and differentiation developmental theories, crafting an inherently relational framework of how people relate to what is ultimate. Clinicians employing the RSM understand a client's meaning making and existential framework as dynamically fluid through dialectical periods of dwelling and seeking. Healthy dwelling is understood as in line with the safe haven component of attachment theory (ex.: supportive communities, spiritually and emotionally regulating practices, internalized commitments) while healthy seeking involves questioning and exploring from a secure base, ambiguity tolerance, and an openness to difference (Sandage et al., 2020).

To be clear, the RSM does not assumes a personal God or gods or physical being as part of this relationship. Rather, the RSM asserts that how a client understands their lived experience, especially intense processes called crucible experiences, is intertwined with their understanding of the ultimate, even if they are not using the terms "ultimate reality" or "ultimate concern." Crucible experiences occur during the inevitable occasions where, as Sandage and colleagues wrote, "spiritual disappointment or complacency set in" (Sandage et al., 2020, p. 76). Something prompts a person to question, to seek out a different perspective, which reveals a new unknown, a new experience of anxiety.

Studies of the RSM in psychotherapy indicate this approach is beneficial. Sandage, Jankowski, and colleagues (2020) found that, among psychotherapy clients whose clinicians utilized the RSM and when statistical models controlled for mental health symptoms, spiritual well-being, and spiritual struggles predicted psychosocial functioning. A participant in a 2022 study also of psychotherapy clients whose clinicians utilized the RSM said that being able to bring her spiritual self into the therapy session was "the cherry on top" of her therapy experience. She felt she could bring all influential components of her experience into the session instead of having to do the integration independently after separately meeting with a therapist and her religious leader.

Let's now consider three concrete examples. This first elucidates the crucible experience and offers an example of a positive instance of anxiety:

A woman raised in a high-demand Christian tradition lives her married life dutifully obeying her husband and accommodating his desires. This, she believes and has been taught, is the expectation of a faithful Christian wife; not only does her husband expect her to submit to him, but so does her faith community and God. Without this, she believes, her salvation is at stake. While looking for community after relocating, she befriends other women who are not religious and discovers their marriages not only are more equal but are also substantially happier. Presented with this alternate understanding – these women are not religious at all but are still happily married – she begins to feel she has the space and permission to feel disappointed with her current situation. That spaciousness to explore new emotions is her entry into the crucible moment, the start of her engaging the anxiety that she could have a different present, but what does that mean for her future salvation. With the secure base of her new friends (and a new therapist), she is able to continue

seeking and considering what this alternate reality could look like and make new decisions out of her own agency.

A second, clinical example elucidates the relational experience with the ultimate. A client diagnosed with major depressive disorder recounted to his therapist,

> I really believe God is sentencing me for something…I'm not sure for what exactly…I really wish I knew…I guess just for being a disappointment…or somehow not being worthy of his attention or approval. It's like he's decided to make a point out of me, that no matter how hard I try I will come up short, and therefore I deserve to be unhappy and alone…When God is against you, you are really fucked.

It seems unlikely this antagonistic relationship could be resolved with a yoga class or other outside-of-session homework assignment alone. Therapists utilizing the RSM can engage this client's relationship to the ultimate in a meaningful way that addresses the pain and suffering directly. This approach draws upon what Tillich encouraged regarding problematizing personalistic symbols of God, for example, by inviting clients to describe and interrogate how they relate to God and then consider the merit of those relational connections, the contexts in which that relationship emerged, and the transcendent reality their conceptualization represents.

The clinical goal is to strive for long-term balance between these dialectics and help a client have confidence in their ability to re-establish balance through inevitable experiences of anxiety throughout their life. These dialectics can manifest in relationships through emotional states such as fear or love, attention-seeking or apathy, rage or playfulness (Worthington and Sandage, 2016). Specifically, anxiety, in the RSM, is juxtaposed against growth. Many approaches to treating anxiety have primarily viewed anxiety from a pathological, neurotic, and negative lens instead of considering any potential constructive influence anxiety may offer a person. For instance, while Freud understands anxiety as a manifestation of repression that keeps humans perpetually mentally children, the RSM takes a different approach. Central to the RSM is Tillich's assertion that the neurotic anxiety and fear of falling into non-being is one to be faced and dealt with instead of dismissed or denied, because our finitude is unavoidable.

Clinicians utilizing the RSM create the space for their clients to investigate what Sandage and colleagues call the "ontological anxiety in human experience even as [they] seek to alleviate suffering" (Sandage et al., 2020, p.81). This investigation incorporates serious and deep engagement of the client's existential meaning making systems, which often includes religious or spiritual involvement, as a way to increase a person's ability to move through overwhelming anxiety toward growth. Rather than always being perceived as repressive, the RSM takes a dialectical view of anxiety with the positive attributes, able to foster "growth, creativity, and spiritual transformation" as Sandage and colleagues says, if it is "handled with a healthy balance of self-confrontation and emotional regulation in a supportive relational context," (Sandage et al., 2020, p. 85). Religious and spiritual narratives and teachings can be read in ways that show positive functions of anxiety. For example, in the Christian narrative, anxiety is present in Jesus as he realizes he will die (Tillich, 1963, p. 125). He does not want to do this, and Gospel accounts even record Jesus as asking God to "take this cup from me." While Tillich would label this phrase a fear, the larger narrative is demonstrative of the process of moving from fear to ontological anxiety managed by Jesus' acceptance of and relationship with God. A therapist of a client that resonates with the life of Jesus could remind the client of this reality as a normalization of anxiety as something every human faces or has faced, even Jesus.

A third example from a more recent time in history occurred during the pandemic. Mask-wearing and vaccinations were polarizing actions with people on both sides of the argument often voicing religious motivations for their stances. Memes went around social media that read, "Jesus is my vaccine" from people who did not get vaccinated (and maybe did not willingly mask) as well as "My mask protects you. Your mask protects me" from people who wore masks (and probably got vaccinated). While the former reflects a theological stance aimed at eliminating anxiety around contracting, dying from, or spreading COVID, the latter reflects a positive influence of anxiety around contracting, dying from, or spreading COVID had. "My mask protects you. Your mask protects me" evokes the sentiment of the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," a sentiment present in various

forms across many religious traditions. At a time of heightened risk of death from a highly contagious virus that cares not to whom or if someone prays, anxiety over the existential threat of COVID-19 was well-warranted.

In conclusion, the RSM employs a Tillichean understanding of anxiety's function in a person to support the integration of a client's spiritual or religious identity in the therapeutic process. The RSM agrees that neurotic anxiety is surface level and can be mitigated through surface level practices, such as mindfulness, but existential angst or nihilism require a depth-oriented engagement in the therapy session with what a client considers ultimate. To do so does not require the therapist to agree with, share, or even reinforce the client's beliefs, but rather to engage them as seriously as they would engage the client's relational experience with a romantic partner or boss or parent. Such an approach leaves room in the treatment experience for any and all religious, spiritual, and philosophical orientations, including multiple religious belonging, because the RSM does not hinge on any one tradition being correct. Of course, the RSM's developers had this intention but the model has largely been utilized in Western contexts, so its applicability in other cultures is an empirical question worthy of future study.

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Member Publications and Activities

Christian Danz published *The Theology of Paul Tillich: Contexts and Key issues* with Mercer University Press in 2024.

Taylor Thomas published "Reconstructing Paul Tillich's Ethics of Grace" in the *Toronto Journal of Theology* in 2024.

Greylyn Hydinger published "Śaṅkara, Tillich, and Abhinavagupta's Use of 'God' as a Peircean Index to the Ground of Being and Depths of Nature" in the *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* in 2024.

Member Spotlight

Rev. Dr. Matthew Lon Weaver will be the new editor of the *Bulletin*. Lon has been an active member of the NAPTS since 1997 and mentored many new members in their academic pursuits. He has published four books, most recently *Paul Tillich's Perceptions into Reformation and Revolution*, a co-edited volume with Raymond Asmar, Chrstian Danz, and Martin Leiner in 2019, and *Applied Christian Ethics: Foundations, Economic Justice, and Politics* in 2014. He has numerous articles, book chapters, and presentations throughout his career. But rather than simply list those here, I will include a more personal piece from him to introduce himself to those of you who have not yet met him.

Encounters with the Thought of Paul Tillich

Rev. Dr. Matthew Lon Weaver

My encounters with Tillich began during MDiv studies at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in the 1980s, specifically the Introduction to Christian Ethics course taught by Professor Ronald Stone. One of the texts he chose *Love, Power, and Justice*. While that caught my attention, the experience that

launched my long-term interest in Tillich occurred during my STM studies. This time it was in Stone's Politics and Ethics seminar that he offered each fall term of a presidential election year. There, I volunteered to present Tillich's *The Socialist Decision*. That was certainly a powerful discovery; however, it was Dr. Stone's comments on the follow-up paper that caught my attention: he informed me of the existence of Voice of America speeches written by Tillich for broadcast into Nazi Germany: in German and not yet translated. With that, I began what became my thesis: the translations of the 114 documents composing the VOA speeches and an introduction to them focusing on the layers of resistance within Germany at the time. Half of these were published as *Against the Third Reich* by Westminster/John Knox in 1998.

A highpoint in the process of the publication of the translations was a 1997 lunch meeting with Stone, an editor from Westminster, and Tillich's daughter, Mutie Tillich Farris during the annual sessions of the NAPTS and the AAR. In that conversation, Dr. Farris – a retired professor of English at Julliard – expressed her surprise that her father had the courage to write the speeches. Part of that was based on her memories of his periodic cries in the night in their early years in the United States, perhaps a consequence of traumatic stress experienced during his years as a military chaplain during the First World War. Reflecting on a later period of his life, she described her mixed feelings over his death while planning to return to New York from Chicago to continue his work on the faculty of the New School. While she had grieved his loss, she was glad that he didn't have to deal with New York cabbies who regularly failed to stop for this visibly nervous professor at Union. That was the first of a handful of conversations I was privileged to have with her during smaller gatherings with members of the NAPTS. She was always kind, and she introduced me to vodka gimlets (with extra Rose's lime juice).

Several years later, I wrote a dissertation on Tillich's ethics of war and peace that was published as *Religious Internationalism* by Mercer. Taken with the war speeches, these projects embedded within me a curiosity about Tillich's combination of abstract, theoretic philosophizing with concrete, historical application and significance that remains strong within me. Over the years, I've relished opportunities to write papers focusing on the boundary between Tillich's thought and a range of topics, generally in the field of social justice. Further, in fifteen years of teaching students in secondary and higher education, and in decades of pastoral ministry, I've found that Tillich's thought travels well in illuminating paths for gaining understanding of the perplexities of reality, perhaps best expressed in his method of correlation and his embrace of ambiguity. I recently heard someone declare that Tillich was not an "existentialist." That's a misleading – non correlative and unambiguous – way to interpret Tillich's approach to reality. In fact, Tillich wove together essentialism and existentialism in his understanding of human being: our potential (our essential self) over against our reality (our existential self). At times, our essential side manages to express itself within existence, but at other times it fails to do so. Thus, we are more correctly essential existentialists or existential essentialists. This, to me, provides us with a poetic framework for pursuing the life of depth.

Future Issues

If you presented at a recent meeting and have not published your essay with the *Bulletin* already, please send it as soon as it is ready. Because this is a Society journal, publishing here does not prevent you from also publishing the essay elsewhere. If you have any member notes, recent publications, or other Tillich related activities, please send those as well LonWeaver1509@gmail.com. The program for the November meeting will be available in early fall on the NAPTS website, https://www.napts.org/.