

Spiritual Guides: Pathfinders in the Desert**Fred Dallmayr****Publication Date**

15-12-2017

License

This work is made available under a Copyright Controlled by External Host license and should only be used in accordance with that license.

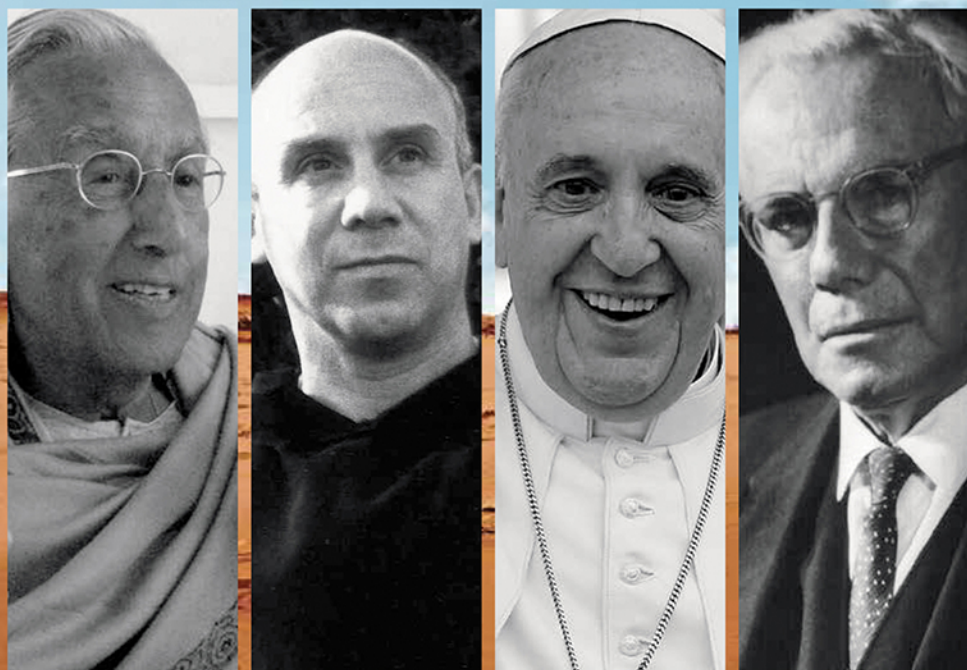
Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)

Dallmayr, F. (2017). *Spiritual Guides: Pathfinders in the Desert* (Version 1). University of Notre Dame. <https://doi.org/10.7274/24824181.v1>

This work was downloaded from CurateND, the University of Notre Dame's institutional repository.

For more information about this work, to report or an issue, or to preserve and share your original work, please contact the CurateND team for assistance at curate@nd.edu.

FRED DALLMAYR



SPIRITUAL GUIDES

PATHFINDERS IN THE DESERT

Spiritual Guides

FRED DALLMAYR

Spiritual Guides

PATHFINDERS IN THE DESERT

University of Notre Dame Press

Notre Dame, Indiana

University of Notre Dame Press
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556
undpress.nd.edu

Copyright © 2017 by University of Notre Dame

All Rights Reserved

Published in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Dallmayr, Fred R. (Fred Reinhard), 1928– author.

Title: Spiritual guides : pathfinders in the desert / Fred Dallmayr.

Description: Notre Dame, Indiana : University of Notre Dame Press, 2017. |

Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2017024327 (print) | LCCN 2017047576 (ebook) | ISBN
9780268102593 (pdf) | ISBN 9780268102609 (epub) | ISBN 9780268102586
(hardback) | ISBN 0268102589 (hardcover)

Subjects: LCSH: Spiritual life—Christianity. | Christian life. | Spiritual
life. | Religious life. | Spirituality. | BISAC: PHILOSOPHY / Ethics &
Moral Philosophy. | POLITICAL SCIENCE / History & Theory. |
RELIGION / Spirituality.

Classification: LCC BV4501.3 (ebook) | LCC BV4501.3 .D3523 2017 (print) |
DDC 230—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017024327>

∞ *This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992
(Permanence of Paper).*

This e-Book was converted from the original source file by a third-party vendor. Readers who notice any formatting, textual, or readability issues are encouraged to contact the publisher at ebooks@nd.edu

In Memory of

Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C. (1917–2015)

and Rev. George F. McLean, O.M.I. (1929–2016)

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.

—1 John 3:15

*When the practice of ahimsa becomes universal,
God will reign on earth as He does in heaven.*

—Mahatma Gandhi, *Non-Violence
in Peace and War* (1948)

*Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your
faithful and kindle in them
the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit
and they shall be created.
And you shall renew
the face of the earth.*

—Pentecostal Chant

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
Introduction: Through the Desert	1
One Faithful Expectation: Hommage à Paul Tillich	13
Two Sacred Secularity: Raimon Panikkar's Holistic Faith	35
Three From Desert to Bloom: Thomas Merton's Contemplative Praxis	57
Four Herald of Glad Tidings: Pope Francis as Teacher of Global Politics	79
Five Modes of Religious Spirituality: Some Christian and Islamic Legacies	95
Six Emptiness and Compassion: Some Christian-Buddhist Encounters	119
Epilogue: On Being Poor in Spirit	139
<i>Notes</i>	145
<i>Index</i>	173

Preface

Reflecting on contemporary religiosity in North America, theologian Matthew Ashley reached some discomfiting conclusions. “If one peruses the sections on ‘spirituality’ or ‘inspiration’ in a Noble or Border bookstore,” he wrote, “one comes away with the impression that spirituality is something that relatively secure middle- or upper-middle-class North Americans do in their spare time.” As part of the pervasive culture of consumerism, spirituality appears here as another marketable item designed to relieve a lingering sense of boredom—an item readily supplied by a culture industry that has discovered that “spirituality sells.”¹

The present book is not, and cannot possibly be, a part of the reigning culture industry. This is so because it basically challenges and disrupts the dominant Western culture, seeing it mostly as an expanding wasteland or desert (in the sense of Nietzsche’s saying “the desert grows”). This desert character is evident in incessant warmongering, in political and economic domination, in spoliation of natural resources, in destruction of human solidarity, and above all in mindless consumerism and greedy self-satisfaction. Spirituality, as it is treated here, is a painfully wrenching effort to extricate human and social life from these ills. This effort takes the form of engaged practices, but first and most of all of radical mindfulness and contemplation—a contemplation seeking to break through to the depths of existential experience in order to retrieve buried layers of insight as a pathway to recovery.

Spiritual effort in this sense is not, and cannot be, a purely academic exercise or something people may (or may not) do “in their spare time.” It can arise only from a profoundly felt need or neediness: the need to escape from the spreading devastation. Martin Heidegger, in his study of Nietzsche, speaks of the mindless or absent-minded “needlessness” (*Notlosigkeit*) of modern culture covering up an urgent existential need (*Not*): “The reigning lack of need renders ‘Being’ needful in the extreme.” As he adds: “Needlessness, as the guise of Being’s extreme needfulness, reigns precisely in the age of the darkening of beings, our age of confusion, violence and despair in human culture.” What is required for recovery is a thorough exposure to the desert (of needlessness) to experience there the full force of the needed recovery.²

What Heidegger states in difficult philosophical language, the spiritual leaders I have chosen to discuss in this book express in a different, more accessible idiom. Nevertheless, at least three of the guides—Paul Tillich, Raimon Panikkar, and Thomas Merton—were thoroughly familiar with Heidegger’s work and often cite (directly or indirectly) his teachings. Here I make no claim of a coincidence of views, just the presence of certain affinities. What links all four guides (including Pope Francis) together is the view of spiritual life as an *itinerarium*, a pathway along difficult and often uncharted roads. But this also corresponds to Heidegger’s motto, “*Wege nicht Werke*” (Paths not Works).

Pentecostal chant “Come, Holy Spirit,” cited in one of the opening epigraphs, was the favorite prayer of Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., president of the University of Notre Dame from 1952 to 1987, an exemplary practitioner of what is called “contemplation in action,” who welcomed me warmly to Notre Dame in 1979. This book is a memorial tribute to Father Hesburgh and also to Fr. George McLean, who allowed the spirit to guide him in his relentless explorations of cultural and religious traditions around the world.

As always, my deep thanks go to my family and my friends, who have supported and continue to support me on my itinerary.

Introduction

Through the Desert

One of the famous passages in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* says that "the desert grows." "Desert" here means a spreading wasteland where everything creative, fruitful, and nourishing decays and withers. It is in this sense that the passage is often invoked by social and political thinkers (including myself)—and for good reasons.¹ Nietzsche's phrase draws attention to a central feature of late-modern life: the growing atrophy of cultural and spiritual legacies and the increasing spoliation and depletion of the natural habitat. The main reason for this decay is the near-exclusive emphasis on productivity, efficiency, and profitability and the transformation of everything valuable into a useful resource (what Martin Heidegger called "standing reserve"). If one adds to these forms of spoliation the expanding arsenal of lethal weapons and the growing capability of humankind to engineer the nuclear destruction of the world, Nietzsche's desert or wasteland becomes an overwhelming picture of doom. I agree with this picture. However, I want to draw attention here to another sense of "desert," curiously related to the first, namely, as a place of solitude, meditation, and recovery from the wasteland of spoliation and devastation. All the great religious and spiritual traditions of the world pay tribute to this kind of desert.

The curious relation of the two senses of "desert" means that one has to venture into an uninhabited, unsettled place or no-place in

order to perceive the settled ways of existing society as a wasteland and thereby find recovery. The story of the Jewish exodus from Egypt is a good example. Having been enslaved in Egypt for a generation after the death of Joseph—and having been in many ways assimilated into Egyptian customs and beliefs—the Israelites determined to break free of their slavery under the leadership of Moses. Avoiding hostile territories, Moses led his followers into desert land, which caused them much suffering and deprivation. When they reached the Red Sea, with their enemies in hot pursuit, the sea was miraculously parted and transformed again into dry land. Following this divine rescue, the Israelites began their wandering in the wilderness, a wandering that is said to have lasted for forty years—a period presumably required for them to abandon their Egyptian ways of life. According to scripture, the people in the desert were nourished by “manna” from heaven and water from the rocky ground; at Mount Sinai, they were given divine commandments to guide and restructure their lives. Thus prolonged and difficult desert experiences gave rise to new beginnings. As the psalmist writes (107:35–36): “He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into gushing springs. There he lets the hungry dwell, and establish a city to live in.”²

Jesus retreated frequently into the desert or wilderness for intensive prayer and self-collection. Most memorable is the time, at the beginning of his ministry, when it is said that he was led by the spirit into the wilderness, where he fasted for forty days. At the end of this period, he was tempted by the devil in various ways. The most significant of these in the present context was the temptation of worldly power and domination. The devil, we are told (Luke 4:5–8), took Jesus to a high place, showed him all the kingdoms of the earth, and offered him “all this power and their glory” in exchange for submission. To Jesus, whose only obedience was to God, this clearly was a very bad bargain: to the lover of God, all the kingdoms, with all their power and glory, must have appeared as a vast wasteland—in contemporary terminology, as a desert ravaged by militarism and consumerism. Thus the temptation in this case was not even tempting. Moreover, there is a curious twist to the story: the temptation was actually redundant. For the believer, God already rules the world and “all the kingdoms” and thus already is endowed with all possible

authority and glory. Jesus's refusal contains an important lesson for all times: that God rules differently, that his authority is altogether different from worldly power and glory.³

Desert and wilderness also play pivotal roles in other religious traditions. Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, is known to have retreated periodically during his middle years into a mountainous wilderness near Mecca in order to pray and meditate. One night around 610 A.D., while praying at Mount Hira, he had a spiritual experience in the sense that (as tradition teaches) the "word of God" was revealed to him by archangel Gabriel—a word that he initially resisted and did not feel competent to disclose to anyone. It was only after a period of self-doubt and repeated prayerful retreats that he accepted his role as a discloser or "reciter" of God's message. His opponents were mainly the rich members of the urban "consumer" society in Mecca. A dramatic exodus from affluent, settled life into "unsettlement" or no-place lies also at the roots of historical Buddhism. As we know, Siddhartha Gautama grew up in wealthy circumstances as the spoiled heir of the Shakya kingdom in Nepal. As a young man, however, he tired of the life of pointless pleasure and "conspicuous consumption" and went forth into "homelessness" (*pravrajya*) with little or nothing. He wandered through many unsettled places and sought instruction from many people, especially ascetic teachers; eventually, however, he turned to intense meditation or contemplation. After nearly ten years, he finally experienced "awakening" or "enlightenment" (*bodhi*) and then took up the life of an itinerant teacher—becoming widely known as "Shakyamuni" (sage of the Shakyas) or "*Tathágata*" (the one who went forth).

Are there still lessons for our lives today in these distant narratives and far-off experiences? Can we still appreciate the challenge—but also the hardship and distress—involved in the migrations between place and no-place, between settlement and unsettlement, and also the different senses or meanings of "desert" disclosed in them? The theologian Walter Brueggemann and two of his friends recently published a remarkable book titled *The Other Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture*. Pointing to the Exodus of the Israelites from Pharaoh's kingdom, the authors draw a parallel to our time, saying: "This departure into another kingdom [or mode of life] might be closer to

the reality of our nature and what works best for our humanity. This *other* kingdom better speaks to the growing longing for an alternative culture, an alternative way of being together.” The move from one life form to another is not smooth or painless but rather tough and challenging. The authors here speak of “departure” in the sense of farewell or parting of the ways (*Abschied*): “We use the word *departing* to remember and to re-perform the Israelites’ Exodus into the wilderness away from Egypt, for the journey into a social order not based on [conspicuous] consumption seems equally imposing [today].” Elaborating more fully on the parallel, the authors present a vivid picture of the difficulties and hardships: “The analog in our time for being beyond Pharaoh’s reach is being beyond the reach of financial credit systems, payday loan operators, developers, the bureaucracy, all the imperial institutions. The path into a neighborly culture can be considered a step into the wilderness, with its uncertainty and lack of visible means of support. The consumer culture, however, is so embedded in our habits and brain wiring that when we move toward the wilderness of covenant and mystery, we are always drawn back to a world of control and contract.”⁴

The hardships and challenges of the turn-around are indeed formidable; in many ways they resemble the challenges presented by a move into monastic life or a monastic community. Political philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre famously concluded his book *After Virtue* with this line: “We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict.” In a subsequent edition, he added this comment: “Benedict’s greatness lay in making possible a quite new kind of institution, that of the monastery of prayer, learning and labor, in which and around which communities could not only survive, but flourish in a period of social and cultural darkness.”⁵ More recently, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has drawn attention to the work of St. Francis and especially his foundation of the Franciscan order as an antidote or alternative to the world of law, property arrangements, and bureaucratic (including clerical) institutions. “What is perhaps the most precious legacy of Franciscanism,” he writes, a legacy “to which the West must return ever anew,” is “how to think a form-of-life, a human life entirely removed from the grasp of law, and a use of bodies and the world that would never be

transformed into an appropriation.” This means that Francis’s legacy is “to think life as that which is never given as a property but only as a common use” (or common practice). By moving outside legal and contractual rules, St. Francis opened the path to a “poverty” not defined simply as a lack of property but as a path of redemption. Later Franciscan theorists, Agamben adds, insisted on the “separation of use/practice from ownership” and on the “genuine primordially” of use/practice vis-à-vis rule or dominion.⁶

To be sure, the challenge of breaking loose from and transforming established conventions not only presents itself to monastic communities and spiritual leaders but also must be faced squarely by philosophy and human thinking as such. A prime example in this respect is the work of Martin Heidegger, the philosopher who famously renewed the “question of Being”—what it means for us to “be”—and whose writings are crucially placed under the aegis of a “turn-around” or *Kehre*. In articulating the needed turn-around, Heidegger appeals explicitly to Nietzsche’s notion of the “growing desert,” bringing this notion in connection with a profound “desertion” happening in our time: the desertion of and by Being, coupled with the pervasive oblivion of the question of Being (*Seinsverlassenheit/Seinsvergessenheit*). As he argues, this oblivion surrenders human life to the powers-that-be, the routines of settled ways of life anchored in self-satisfaction and the desire for appropriation (will to power)—that is, to devastation (*Verwüstung*). Turning away from established habits in his presentation is bound to be wrenching and painful. Curiously, Heidegger in this context uses Brueggemann’s term “departure” in the sense of a courageous “farewell” (*Abschied*) from the routines of thoughtless everydayness. Basically, *Kehre* is meant to serve as a pathway or prelude to recovery in the direction of an “other beginning” (*anderer Anfang*). By the same token, *Kehre* is marked by a process of “expropriation” (*Enteignung*) whereby human beings are prevented from “appropriating” Being and exerting dominion over it. As Heidegger adds, such expropriation occurs under the emblem of the “nobility of poverty” (*Adel der Armut*) nurtured by genuine human care.⁷

In the present book, I have chosen as guides four spiritual leaders or pioneers whose writings have greatly influenced, and continue to

influence, large numbers of people. I could have chosen a number of additional guides, as there is surely no shortage of influential mentors. I have selected the four figures discussed in this book—Paul Tillich, Raimon Panikkar, Thomas Merton, and Pope Francis—mainly because of their insistence on the need for radical *metanoia*, turn-around or *Kehre*. A main limitation of this choice is its central focus on Western exemplars of spiritual life. In part, this choice was motivated by the desire to keep the book within manageable limits. In addition, my selection was guided by the assumption or conviction that it is in Western societies where social and ecological spoliation or *Verwüstung* is most advanced and where turn-around is hence most urgently needed. Nevertheless, my cross-cultural and interfaith leanings or commitments have prompted me to add two further chapters extending my reflections on spirituality to other religious and spiritual traditions, especially to some of the vibrant traditions in the Islamic world and also in India and East Asia. I still can be accused of neglecting some of the rich folk traditions of spirituality found in Africa, Latin America, and the Oceanic world. But I leave this exploration to others more competent and more thoroughly steeped in these legacies.⁸

The four guides chosen for this book are to a large extent bridge-builders or champions of a “holistic” recovery from modern fragmentation. The bridges they build seek to reconnect the transtemporal and the temporal, the “sacred” and the “secular,” and also theoretical insight and social praxis. In academic terms, their endeavors link together—in fruitful tension—theology with philosophy, Christian dogmatics with the humanities and social sciences. An outstanding exemplar of such intellectual breadth is the “dialectical” theology and spirituality of Paul Tillich. Chapter 1, devoted to him, guides the reader through the different stages of his intellectual and theological development. During his early phase, prior to his emigration to America, Tillich was embroiled in the political turmoil of the Weimar Republic, which pitted against each other bourgeois capitalism, collectivist communism, and racial nativism (fascism)—movements that, for him, were the result of radical egocentrism or mundane anthropocentrism. As an antidote or counterfoil he formulated the idea of a “religious socialism” that would reconnect prophetic expectations

and concrete historical possibilities as well as individual freedom and social solidarity. During the same period, Tillich also coined the conceptual triad of external “heteronomy,” self-centered “autonomy,” and “theonomy,” with the last term dialectically overcoming and subsuming the other categories. His book *The Socialist Decision* offered a stunning theological-political analysis of the forces active in the Weimar Republic, predicting (correctly) that the choice would ultimately come down to that between religious socialism and fascist “barbarism.”

Following his emigration to America, Tillich devoted his energies mainly to the formulation of his “dialectical theology,” although he never abandoned his concern with political (or political-theological) issues. In his treatment, dialectical theology meant basically an effort to overcome the radical separation of the “sacred” and the “profane” (a dichotomy championed for some time by Karl Barth) in the direction of a mutual correlation and contestation. “Correlation” here means that the sacred or divine confronts the secular-profane world with a prophetic challenge or demand, while secularity anchored in concrete experience prevents religion from evaporating into wishful thinking or pious platitudes. As one should note, Tillich’s “dialectics” is indebted to Hegel’s philosophy while eschewing the latter’s idealist teleology. The strongest influence on Tillich, however, came from Friedrich Schelling, who, in a way, had concretized Hegel by elaborating a dialectical relation between “existence” and “essence” or between life and spirit. The major achievement of Tillich’s later years was the completion of his *Systematic Theology*, a work in which dialectical spirituality in the sense of a tensional world-God relationship reaches its most eloquent expression. A major guidepost in this work is the theme of the promised coming of the “Kingdom of God,” a coming that for Tillich has both an “inner-historical” and a “transhistorical” character, thus holding immanence and transcendence in delicate balance. While fervently pleading for openness to the divine promise (and linking its immanent aspect again with religious socialism), he became increasingly fearful that—without serious *metanoia*—the ongoing process of militarization and spoliation would lead to a new barbarism that would take the form of global war and nuclear holocaust.

In the case of Raimon Panikkar, Tillich's dialectical approach is transformed into an emphatic—though tensional or differentiated—"holism." The key expressions Panikkar uses to pinpoint his holistic faith are "sacred secularity" and "cosmotheandric vision," a vision that links closely together the dimensions of the divine, the human, and the natural-material world. The notion of "sacred secularity" surfaces in some of his early writings dealing with religious worship in secular modernity. Detecting in our time a special "*kairos*" or "axial" possibility, he argues that "only worship can prevent secularization from becoming inhuman, and only secularization can save worship from being meaningless."⁹ The upshot is that, in the new dispensation, the secular or temporal surfaces also as "sacred"—though not without engendering mutual rifts, contestations, and possible derailments. In subsequent writings, Panikkar extended his holistic outlook to the interreligious and cross-cultural domain. In this respect, he emerged as one of the leading thinkers of religious and cultural pluralism, a perspective that—radically opposed to both cultural absolutism and relativism—relies on the forging of lateral ties between cultures through dialogue and mutual interaction. One of Panikkar's persistent targets of criticism in this context is "globalism," understood as the policy of cultural-political hegemony or imperialism. His book *Cultural Disarmament* formulates a "philosophy of peace" that, in opposition to *pax Romana* or *pax Americana*, urges the cultivation of mutual recognition and nonviolent cross-cultural engagement. The concluding part of the chapter devoted to Panikkar explores the compatibility of religious holism with radical prophetic demands. As I try to show, Panikkar's holism—properly construed as operating on the deep level of "ontological trust"—does not exclude or cancel his endorsement of the prophetic demand for justice in the world.

In one of his writings titled *Blessed Simplicity*, Panikkar presented "monkhood" or monastic life not as a special occupation or profession but rather as a disposition constitutive of humanity as such: the disposition to care about existence and the point of "being" (and thus to overcome the oblivion of Being, *Seinsvergessenheit*). This is precisely the meaning that we find in Thomas Merton's turn to monastic life. To this extent, Merton's stay at Gethsemani abbey should be seen not as an aberrant exception but as an exemplary model of a

thoughtful human life well lived. Under the rubric of “pathways to solitude,” the chapter of my book devoted to Merton explores first of all his lifelong commitment to meditation and depth reflection as an antidote to absorption into the mindless busyness of the contemporary world. As he writes at one point: “Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully aware. What contemplation also discovers, however, is that life is not self-generated, but proceeds from a source which is hidden and discloses itself basically in a call or provocation.”¹⁰ One aspect that is crucial in Merton’s account is that meditation or contemplation is not simply a form of introspection or retreat into inner selfhood. His texts are emphatic in rejecting the linkage between contemplation and the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*; this means that going inside, for him, is always also a going-forward to others (and to God). Thus, contemplative solitude is closely connected with solidarity or communion. In his pithy formulation: “Go into the desert (of solitude) not to escape other human beings but in order to find them (in God).”¹¹

The chapter turns at this point to Merton’s lifelong endeavor to chart a course connecting or reconciling monastic life with active world engagement and social solidarity. The texts reviewed for this purpose are mainly *Contemplation in a World of Action*, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, and *Cold War Letters* (texts revealing a steady crescendo of social commitment). The writings clearly refute the stereotype of Merton as a world-denying recluse “heading for the woods.” At the same time, they testify to his courageous effort to keep his head above the cauldron of prevailing ideological slogans, media indoctrination, and political mind control. What the texts demonstrate most forcefully, however, is Merton’s faithfulness to the prophetic call for justice and peace, which cannot be relegated to “another world” but has to be shouldered (prayerfully) in our time. His denunciation of such evils as racism, imperialism, warmongering, reckless profiteering, and senseless consumerism is among the most vivid and engaging social protests in the spiritual literature. The conclusion of the chapter takes up Merton’s ecumenical endeavors and his growing fascination during his last decade with Asian spirituality. Most memorable in this connection are his writings on the Mahatma Gandhi, on Buddhism, and on Taoism—writings that clearly reveal

his ability to move beyond the “one-eyed giant” of Western rationalism and (presumed) cultural supremacy as well as his openness to worldwide spiritual resources. In this sense, Merton fully validated the notion of contemplation and spiritual mindfulness as the gateway to the depth dimension of our shared humanity.

In our present time, some of the spiritual impulses motivating Merton are continued and reinvigorated in the apostolic work of Pope Francis, who himself chose his name in honor and in memory of St. Francis and the Franciscan monastic tradition. Chapter 4, titled “Herald of Glad Tidings,” shows how the pope’s teachings and writings can serve as a bulwark against global chaos and the growing wasteland or desert of our world. The chapter starts by recalling some of the pontiff’s statements at the war memorial in Redipuglia, Italy, where he denounced war as “utter madness” and also pointed to some of the underlying causes of devastation: “Greed, intolerance, the lust for power . . . these motives underlie the decision to go to war.” These motives, he added, powerfully persist in our present time, unleashing new wars “fought piecemeal, with crimes, massacre, wanton destruction.”¹² In some of his writings and speeches of recent years, Francis strongly attacked a whole host of the ills and “diseases” in today’s world: the growing intolerance between countries, races, and creeds; the massive political and economic inequality between rich and poor, powerful and powerless; the rise of a new idolatry of the “God of money”; the spreading “culture” of consumption and waste; and above all the glorification of violence, turning the whole world into a battlefield. In the face of this battery of derailments, miseries, and dangers, the pontiff urges people to step back from the brink of the abyss and undergo a radical turning or “*metanoia*.” Only such a turning, he stresses, can lead our desert world to social and spiritual renewal—which is a precondition of the proclamation of “glad tidings,” of the promise of God’s kingdom.

As indicated earlier, the concluding two chapters of this book venture beyond the confines of Western religion, especially the confines of traditional Christian spirituality. The aim of both chapters is twofold: to lend greater historical depth to the preceding discussions focused on the recent and contemporary period and to add a broader cross-cultural and interfaith dimension to the book as a whole. Chapter 5

offers a comparative exploration of different modes of spirituality as found in Christian and Islamic traditions. At this point I introduce a distinction between chiefly two kinds of spirituality (a distinction that had been present but not explicitly thematized in prior chapters): namely, between a basically vertical and a basically lateral orientation, that is, between an orientation aiming at ultimate fusion or union with God's transcendence and one reaching out to other human beings in love (*agape*) and practical service. While admiring the "transcendentalist" fervor of the first type, the chapter alerts readers to possible destructive or violent repercussions for worldly, interhuman relations (repercussions following the motto "*fiat iustitia pereat mundus*"). Although acknowledging possible manipulative dangers, the chapter (and the book as a whole) pleads in favor of the *agape*- and service-oriented type of spirituality. The concluding chapter 6 explores prominent Christian "encounters" with Asian spirituality, with a focus on Buddhism and especially on the Buddhist notions of "emptiness" (*sunyata*) and "compassion" (*karuna*). For purposes of illustration, the chapter returns to three of the spiritual guides discussed in earlier chapters: Tillich, Panikkar, and Merton. As it happens, all three in their later years developed an intensive interest in Zen Buddhism, though from different backgrounds and with different focal concerns.

The epilogue turns to a famous sermon by the German mystic Meister Eckhart: "*Beati pauperes spiritu*," "Blessed are the poor in spirit." What emerges in that sermon is a fascinating emphasis on radical self-emptying and nonpossession—an emphasis that is not very far removed from the Buddhist notion of "emptiness" (*sunyata*). Only the experience and confession of such dispossession can lead from desert to renewal, from poverty onto the path of spiritual redemption.

Chapter One

Faithful Expectation

Hommage à Paul Tillich

In which of these groups do you belong—among those who respond to the prophetic spirit, or among those who close their ears and hearts to it?

—Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations*

Half a century ago, in 1965, Paul Tillich passed away. At that time, he was by all counts the leading and most highly esteemed Protestant theologian in America. In the meantime, many things have happened—among them the Cold War, the dismantling of the Soviet Union, and finally the rise of ISIS. In the course of these events, Tillich's legacy more and more faded from view. It is true that today there are efforts to revitalize that legacy and to foreground the “radical” and forward-pointing elements of his work. However, with some notable exceptions, the effort is undertaken mainly by professional theologians with the aim of “radicalizing” his *theological* teachings.¹ What tends to be forgotten is that, for Tillich, religious faith was always closely entwined with culture and social conditions, which means that, apart from being a theologian, he was also a public intellectual trying to take the “pulse of his age.” It is this linkage of faith and social reality that, in my view, is at the heart of Tillich's

work. If this is correct (as I believe), revitalizing his work cannot be left solely to theologians and experts in religious studies but must be shouldered also by humanists and social scientists, including political philosophers. In fact, I want to claim that his continued relevance depends on that collaboration.

Viewed from this perspective, Tillich's work in large measure emerges as "untimely" or "out of season"; it is situated at a steep angle to modern society and modern Western culture (what Heidegger called modern "metaphysics"). This does not mean that he was an "outsider" or that his thought arose out of "nowhere" (he was clearly rooted in the Christian tradition). Rather, his entire work can be seen as the result of an intense critical struggle with some dominant thought patterns or worldviews of modernity. Without such engagement and struggle, all high-sounding words—like "God" or "perennial ideas"—were for him *flatus vocis* (empty sounds) devoid of grounding in human experience. At the same time, while always exploring experiential warrants, Tillich was unwilling to surrender himself to "worldliness" or the changing fashions of the day. In this respect, his outlook resonated in many ways with the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, penned by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (his one-time colleagues in Frankfurt). In the following I examine some of the "untimely" (and to this extent "radical") features of Tillich's work, considered as the product of a public intellectual cum theologian. Three aspects are highlighted: his defense of "religious socialism," his "dialectical" political theology, and his portrayal of both the promises and the dangers of the emerging global culture.

"Religious Socialism"

One of the more astonishing aspects of Tillich's revitalization today is the relatively scant attention being paid to his "socialist" roots and commitments. No doubt this fact has something to do with the taboo character of the term "socialism" in America. Still, one may wonder about the extent of the theologians' accommodation on this issue. It is true that, during his time in America (especially the postwar "red scare" period), Tillich himself considerably toned down and even

avoided direct references to socialism or socialist agendas. However, he never directly recanted or repudiated his socialist texts (written mostly before his emigration). In fact, one can say that, until the very end of his life, there was a strong current or undercurrent of socialist sensibilities—and this was quite in keeping with his view of the healing and bonding character of religion. To be sure, one has to note the distinctive meaning of “socialism” for Tillich. It surely had nothing in common with the materialistic collectivism that, under the label of “communism,” had emerged in the Soviet Union. To mark the difference, Tillich preferred the phrase “religious socialism.” But even here, caution is required. The phrase did not imply a social system guided by or operating under the tutelage of an established Church—an arrangement that would have violated a basic cornerstone of modern democracy: the separation (or, better, differentiation) of church and state.²

Tillich’s socialist leanings emerged first in the heady months after World War I when Germany was in the throes of radical change. The German emperor abdicated in December 1918, and the Protestant (evangelical) church—a main pillar of the Empire—was in disarray. A dissident church movement (calling itself the “New Church Alliance”) arose at that time, and Tillich was immediately attracted to it. The movement issued a programmatic statement, signed by Tillich, that charted a clear pathway to the future. Among the main positions advocated in the statement were these: support for the emerging “republican” or democratic regime infused by a “farsighted socialism” in which the “personal worth” of each member would be upheld over against the “capitalist egotism” of the Bismarck period, alignment with the international peace movement in opposition to nationalism and militarism, and, finally, construction of an international league to replace the old system of brute power politics. Tillich did not remain for long in that movement but continued to present lectures in the same dissident spirit—much to the dismay of old-style Protestants desiring to regain their “established” status. Distilling the gist of these speeches, Tillich (joined by a friend) in mid-1919 issued a report under the title “Socialism as a Question of the Church.” The report (I rely on Ronald Stone’s summary) insisted that Christian faith is not purely transcendental or otherworldly; nor does it counsel a purely personal or inward retreat. Rather, in accord with gospel

teachings, it necessarily has a social impact and relevance: its spirit favors some social arrangements over others. Specifically, Christianity bears a closer affinity with socialism than with capitalism (at least in its monopolistic form). This affinity is demonstrated by the tendency of industrial capitalism to support militarism and war, in opposition to Christian teachings and practices.³

A year later, in 1920, Tillich joined a new group in Berlin that proved to be even more congenial to his religious commitment: the “*Kairos* Circle,” which he served as a leader for four years. Bringing together a number of socially engaged intellectuals from several academic disciplines, the circle was mainly concerned with such issues as the relation of faith and society, the connection between the eternal and the temporal or historical, and the nature and goal of socialist society. The crucial topic, of course, was pinpointed by the term “*kairos*” (meaning “right time” or fulfilled time): How can the eternal or divine penetrate into the temporal? How can the sacred manifest itself in the secular or social? As Tillich stated in a lead essay in 1922, the term implies a call or a demand issued to temporality or history from the “depth of the Unconditional”—where the latter reflects an absolute or “ultimate concern.” Issuing from a level transcending all particular time, such a call is contained in the biblical *Shemah Israel*: “Thou shalt love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, *all* your mind, and *all* your being”—to which is added the coequal demand to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Only where these two demands (which are one) are fully heard and followed can one speak of the possibility of a *kairos*. For Tillich, the period after World War I bore the mark of a possible *kairos* in the form of “religious socialism,” which brings together the love of God and the love of fellow beings in the world. To be sure, in kairological terms, the absolute or “Unconditional” can never be fully temporalized or fulfilled *in* history but remains a prophetic demand. To this extent, the ultimate “Kingdom of God” is not simply a historical event.⁴

Tillich further explored this kairological theme a year later in a major essay titled “Basic Principles of Religious Socialism.” The essay delves immediately into the difficult relation of the two poles: the sacred (vertical) and the temporal (horizontal). In the analysis of a given social situation, Tillich remarks, two basic perspectives can

be distinguished: the “sacramental attitude” that shuns history and the “rationalist” or “historically critical attitude.” The first outlook clings resolutely to “the presence of the divine”; the second seeks to analyze what is happening from a purely human and “critical rational” vantage point. In contrast to both of these outlooks, religious socialism in Tillich’s account adopts a “prophetic attitude” that finds the unity of the sacred and the temporal in their tensional relation: “Prophetism grasps the coming of what *should be* from its living connection with the present that is given” (that is, the potential in its connection with the actual).⁵ For religious socialism, he adds, the prophetic outlook is “essential.” For it must recognize that “the presence of the Unconditional is the *prius* of all conditioned social action” or that “unconditioned meaning is the *prius* to *all* forms of meaning.” Here the kairological aspect emerges. “We have used the word *Kairos*,” Tillich states, “for the content of the prophetic view of history. It signifies a moment of time filled with unconditioned meaning and demand.” As he explains: *kairos* does not contain a “prediction” of the future; nor does it signify a merely abstract demand or postulated “ideal.” Rather, it denotes “the fulfilled moment of time in which the present and the future, the holy that is given and the holy that is demanded meet, and from whose concrete tension the new creation proceeds.”⁶

In the remainder of the essay, the goal or *telos* of religious socialism is more fully elaborated. In this context, Tillich introduces a terminology that has become a trademark of this thought: the triadic distinction between “autonomy,” “heteronomy,” and “theonomy.” Like most modern thinkers, the theologian appreciates human “autonomy” when it is seen as a bulwark against all forms of political, cultural, and clerical domination, that is, against oppressive “heteronomy.” Taken in this sense, autonomy refers to the creative, liberating *élan* captured in Kant’s “*sapere aude!*” However, when self-centered and pursued without limits, this *élan* can also take on destructive features—which Tillich describes as “demonic.” Unleashed in the political domain, the demonic potential takes the form of a “this-worldly utopianism” exemplified by chauvinistic nationalism (fascism) and Stalinist communism. In opposition to these derailments, some people glorify submission to heteronomy, sometimes backed

up by divine authority. This glorification can also foster “demonic” aberrations, especially an “otherworldly utopianism” exemplified by “theocratic movements” in which the “absolute rule of God” or the “sovereignty of the Unconditional” is directly imposed on society. In contrast to these dystopias, “theonomy” for Tillich seeks to correlate the sacred and the temporal and, to this extent, preserves the “prophetic” outlook on history. Wedded to this correlation, religious socialism necessarily maintains an ambivalent, “dialectical” relation to society: it contains within itself a prophetic “No” to the actual situation, but also a “Yes” to the potential. It takes its stand against both otherworldly and this-worldly “demonries.”⁷

To be sure, religious socialism for Tillich was not a fixed doctrine or party platform but rather a tentative formula open to revisions and corrections. As it happened, the growing fragility of the Weimar Republic prompted him to accept the need for a more robust political engagement. In 1929 he joined the Social Democratic Party and endorsed some of its “realistic” policies.⁸ To some extent, one can surmise, his outlook was also influenced by his 1929 move to Frankfurt, where, as a professor at the university (succeeding Max Scheler), he came in close contact with the Institute for Social Research, most of whose members shared left-Hegelian or “humanist Marxist” leanings. According to Ronald Stone, Tillich at that time became even “more directly involved in active socialist politics than most Frankfurt theorists.”⁹ The intellectual high point of his engagement, however, came in early 1933 with the publication of *The Socialist Decision*—shortly before the Nazi takeover, which triggered his dismissal and emigration.

By all counts, *The Socialist Decision* is one of Tillich’s major mature works—a chef d’oeuvre of both political theology and political philosophy. As he makes clear in his “Foreword,” the book seeks to profile and concretize further the meaning of “religious socialism” used in his earlier writings. This effort was needed in view of the perilous condition of Europe and Germany at the time: the rise of extremist political movements on the Right and the Left, accompanied by violent clashes. In the face of these perils, Tillich stated, it was only “by a common socialist decision that the fate of death now hanging over the peoples of Europe can be averted.” Hence, a strong commitment to socialism (of some kind) was imperative. The

issue, of course, was the character of this commitment. For Tillich, socialism could not be identified with “scientism,” or the belief in necessary social progress; nor could Marxism be equated with Stalinist communism. *The Socialist Decision* aimed to correct prevalent misconstruals: “It holds fast to Marxism and defends it against the pure activism of a younger generation; but it also rejects the scientism and dogmatic materialism of an older generation.” More precisely, this means that the text harkens back to the “real Marx” (that is, the “humanist” Marx) and a concept of dialectic in which “necessity and freedom are conjoined.” Regarding the “religious” element, Tillich’s stance coincides with a “moderately prophetic” outlook (shunning all dogmatism or orthodoxy). “Socialism,” the foreword concludes, “has to be sober in its analysis, and sober in the attitude of ‘expectation’ it assumes. . . . [It] requires the clearest, most sober realism—though it must be a ‘faithful realism’ (*gläubiger Realismus*), a realism of expectation.”¹⁰

In its opening section, the text lays the groundwork of the study by sketching the outlines of a philosophical anthropology largely derived from “existentialist” teachings. As Tillich states firmly: “The roots of political thought must be sought in human being itself”—but this human being is internally split or in tension, namely, between its past (*whence*) and its future (*whither*). Tillich calls the former “origin” or “natural being” and the second “freedom” and “consciousness.” Genuine political thinking, he elaborates, must proceed on this tensional basis and find its roots “simultaneously in ‘being’ and consciousness” (a dual anchorage captured in Heidegger’s depiction of human *Dasein* as a “thrown project”). Differently put, one must recognize that human life “proceeds in a tension between [thrown] dependence on the origin and [projected] independence.” From a political angle, it is important to note that the natural roots of existence (*whence*) has itself a dual status: it can be salutary and enabling or confining and repressing. In the latter case, natural being gives rise to the “myth of origin,” which—according to Tillich—is “the root of all conservative and Romantic thought in politics.” In opposition to a nostalgic “return to the womb,” consciousness confronts human existence with an “unconditional demand”: the demand to shape its own future (*whither*) freely and without dependence. This rupture

with the past is “the root of liberal, democratic, and socialist thought in politics,” that is, the root of (Western) modernity. However, cut loose from all dependence, liberal modernity also shatters the mutual dependence between human beings as well as the interdependence of humanity and nature, leading to intense strife on all levels. Hence, a new stage has to be found—the stage of “socialism”—in which the enabling potency of the origin can be enlisted for a renewed “just” interdependence: “Justice is the ‘true’ power of being; in it the (enabling) intention of the origin is fulfilled.”¹¹

As indicated in its opening pages, the aim of the study is to develop a (political) philosophy of history coupled with hints of soteriology. In the present context, only the main lines of the argument can briefly be traced. As mentioned before, “political Romanticism” for Tillich signals a return to the past through the erection of a static “myth of origin” in which the repressive aspect of the origin comes to cancel its enabling side. The first break with the myth occurred in Judaism, especially in the prophetic tradition, where “time was elevated above space” through the forecast of a “new heaven and new earth.” As Tillich notes, however, the break was not complete, because the prophetic message and historical Judaism cannot be equated. In fact, there has always been a struggle between Old Testament prophetism and the persistent lure of the “origin” in the form of Jewish nationalism.¹² The second break with myth occurred in the European Enlightenment, which liberated “autonomous consciousness” by suppressing the dimension of the origin (and even the “depth dimension of existence” altogether). At this point, particular things or objects in their finitude became the chief targets of scientific “knowledge and manipulation.” Before proceeding, Tillich distinguishes between two types of political Romanticism: a “reactionary” (or conservative) type and a “revolutionary” (or populist) type. The first type appeals mainly to older elites, like nobles, landowners, and high clergy, while the second caters to people alienated from bourgeois modernity and seeking relief in myths and rituals. The second type—against which Tillich’s book is basically directed—is “revolutionary” only in the sense of fashioning a new mythology (like the Nazi myth of the “Third Reich”) while canceling or suppressing all elements of modern autonomy or emancipation.¹³

The ensuing chapters of *The Socialist Decision* deal, respectively, with Western modernity, the rise of bourgeois society with its intrinsic antinomies, and the prospect of a socialist overcoming or “sublation” of antinomies. As Tillich observes, in Western modernity the myth of origin was shattered by the two prongs of Protestantism and Enlightenment: the first discarding medieval religious bonds, the second removing political and intellectual forms of heteronomy. Launched by these two prongs, modern bourgeois society ushered in the sway of “autonomous this-worldliness.” Emerging from the “dissolution” of all prior conditions, bourgeois society involves the triumph of a human-centered project that “subjugates an objectified world to its own purposes.” In its optimistic self-understanding, modern “liberal” society claims to guarantee social equilibrium and harmony—a claim that is spurious. For, by subjugating the “objectified world,” this society creates an antinomy between humanity and nature and, in its linkage with capitalism, a class division between rich and poor. Moreover, antagonisms of this kind spill over from domestic society into the international arena, leading to colonial struggles between the West and non-West, between center and periphery. All these diremptions cry out for resolution—which cannot be found in the confines of bourgeois modernity. What socialism brings is a radical change of paradigm, a leap from the actual condition to the reign of potentiality. In doing so, socialism recaptures the “enabling” spirit of the “origin” with its promise of just relationships. To this extent, its aim is not merely to overcome class division and exploitation but rather to end dehumanization and the reification of the world in all its dimensions.¹⁴

What even this brief summary should convey is the bold analytical grasp and also the continued relevance of Tillich’s study. Although penned during the Weimar Republic’s plunge into collapse, its analytical categories have lost little of their cogency and disturbing quality. To some extent—one might say—the cultural and political afflictions of Weimar are haunting the contemporary world on a global scale. There is still the lure of “political Romanticism” both in the form of old-style cultural and religious elitism and in the more radical guise of nationalistic (and quasi-fascist) populism. And there is the massive presence of globalized financial capitalism with its offshoots

of domestic division between rich and poor (the 1 percent and the 99 percent) and the worldwide contrast between North and South, between center and periphery. Finally, there are rumblings, here and there, of a paradigm shift heralding transformation and a better future. On all these levels, Tillich's text was uncannily farsighted. It also was pioneering on a strictly philosophical level: in many ways, his look anticipated by a decade Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (composed in 1943). Like that work, *The Socialist Decision* was "dialectical" in character—in the sense not of a logically grounded Hegelian teleology but of Adorno's "negative dialectics," in which the future is a sheltered expectation.¹⁵ There was one further sign of farsightedness in *The Socialist Decision*. Toward the end, Tillich writes this lapidary sentence: "The salvation of European society from a return to barbarism lies in the hands of socialism."¹⁶ As it happened, this return to barbarism was just around the corner.

Dialectical Theology

Despite initial hesitations, Tillich emigrated in 1933 from Germany to New York, where he joined the Union Theological Seminary. With this move he entered the "New World"—a world that was also in many ways new and alien to him. Clearly, despite some cultural overlaps, U.S. America at the time was not Weimar Germany, where his formative experiences were rooted. For one thing, the political and ideological spectrum in America was more uniform or narrow than in Weimar. Basically, the American regime was shaped by British-style "liberalism," which had initially emerged in opposition to old-style Tory conservatism. In the course of America's development, the older Tory elements—to the extent they survived—had blended steadily into the dominant liberal-bourgeois structure (adding only occasional cultural reservations). Thus America left little or no room for the "reactionary Romanticism" Tillich had described. On the other hand, Tillich's "populist Romanticism" was at best an undercurrent (held in abeyance for the time being). What occupied center stage in America was the "bourgeois-liberal" principle in its alliance with industrial and financial capitalism. From the vantage point of

this dominant ideology, the chief political and economic enemy was—more than fascism—the current of socialism and communism (often with little effort to distinguish the various branches). Given this ideological situation, Tillich, as a prominent “socialist emigré,” faced a quandary or dilemma. The quandary was intensified by the fact that Tillich himself regarded socialism not as an abstract ideal but as a concrete movement growing out of real-life experiences and needs. However, in the absence of a viable workers’ movement, how was it possible to make a “socialist decision”?¹⁷

Viewed from this angle, Tillich’s so-called retreat from politics into theology in America—an aspect sometimes praised, sometimes bemoaned—gains at least some plausibility and intelligibility. Clearly, his initial condition in the country was delicate as a resident alien (he did not become a citizen until 1940). Moreover, as he frequently stated, he came to America not only to preach but also to learn and absorb what is valuable. Most important, the period after 1933 proved to be very challenging for him precisely as a theologian. The situation of Christian churches in Germany at that time was extremely precarious—a condition he observed attentively and anxiously. There was a concerted effort on the part of the Nazi regime to co-opt Christian, especially Protestant, churches—an effort that was to some extent deplorably successful (especially among so-called German Christians). As a theologian who had always stressed the linkage of religion and social life, Tillich was compelled to profile his position more clearly. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth had made a sharp cut between religion and the “world,” between the sacred and the profane—a cut that tended to exile churches to a “holy mountain” while leaving the secular realm stranded. Given his long-standing “kairological” leanings, Tillich could not accept this dichotomy, which, in effect, weakened or undercut the “prophetic” quality of faith. As he came to see, the German situation exemplified the need for a more adequate “dialectical” theology, that is, a theology that resists both the “politicization” (or political co-optation) of religion and its “privatization” in the inner lives of believers.¹⁸

As one should note, the term “dialectical” here has a special meaning. Basically, the term denotes not a purely logical formula but rather the emblem of a concrete struggle and experiential engagement.

For Tillich, the Barthian dichotomy of sacred and profane could not be resolved through a simple fusion or amalgamation. Rather, the two categories or dimensions had to be recognized as distinct—but distinct precisely in their correlation and mutual contestation. In this view, the sacred or divine confronts everything profane or secular with a prophetic judgment; in turn, the secular prevents the divine from evaporating into abstract idealism or wishful thinking. As previously indicated, Tillich's "dialectics" stands on the shoulders of Hegel's philosophy—minus the latter's idealist teleology or eschatology. The same relation obtains to Marx's work—where "orthodox" historical determinism gives way to "humanist" praxis. As also indicated, Tillich's argument resembles in some ways Adorno's "negative dialectics"—not consciously but by way of serendipity. One major influence that needs to be mentioned (and one that he always acknowledged) is the work of Friedrich Schelling, who, in a way, had concretized Hegel by elaborating a dialectic between "existence" and "essence," actuality and potentiality, or between life and spirit. Significant impulses also derive from Schelling's theory of the "world ages," from his distinction between enabling and repressive "origin" (or nature), and from his notion of sequentially correlated "potencies." As Tillich observes at one point: "Only Schelling . . . recognized that reality is not only the manifestation of pure essence (spirit) but also of its contradiction and, above all, that human existence itself is an expression of the contradiction of essence."¹⁹

Needless to say, dialectics in Tillich's sense was not always easy to maintain in the American context because of the close interpenetration of culture and religion. Despite the official separation of church and state, religion over the years had been tightly co-opted by popular culture and the "American way of life"—so tightly as to render a prophetic judgment of culture nearly impossible. Christianity in particular has been the target of massive co-optation, to the point that some writers have been able to portray Jesus as a "national icon" and American Christian faith as part of the "marketplace of culture."²⁰ Religion, however, not only pervades the domestic market in America but also spills over into foreign policy and global agendas. Social theorist Tzvetan Todorov speaks correctly in this context about the proclivity of American culture to promote global "millenarianism"

or “messianism”—a proclivity that, in some quarters, boils over into a hankering for Armageddon or the “end time” of history. When this happens, religion turns into a weapon of violence and global domination; in Tillich’s vocabulary, faith decays from an enabling and salvific potency into a “demonic” force of destruction. In the words of Richard Niebuhr (another major theologian): “When closely allied with emperors and governors, merchants and entrepreneurs,” and living “at peace in culture,” faith “loses its force, corruption enters with idolatry, and the church . . . suffers corruption in turn.”²¹

Throughout his three decades in America, Tillich remained close to the sentiments expressed by Niebuhr and, to this extent, remained faithful to theological “dialectics.” During the 1930s he repeatedly visited Europe, trying to alert people in numerous talks to the terrible dangers of “populist Romanticism” (that is, fascism) while also holding up the vision of a better future. A noticeable undercurrent in his speeches was the idea of “religious socialism,” though often couched in new vocabulary. In 1937 he presented a lecture at an ecumenical conference in Oxford on the theme “The Kingdom of God and History.” In this lecture the notion of the “Kingdom” was clearly a prophetic symbol and an antidote to the derailments of the time. For Tillich, the notion is lodged at the cusp of immanence and transcendence, of history and transhistory—which is the proper locus of a dialectical theology. Seen from this angle, history as such is not meaningful but receives its meaning from a deeper potentiality. Differently and more theologically put: world history is not itself salvific, but salvation is the meaning and promise of world history. In Tillich’s words: “The Kingdom of God is a symbolic expression of the ultimate meaning of existence. The social and political character of this symbol indicates a special relation between the ultimate meaning of existence and the ultimate meaning of human history.” Apart from disclosing an ultimate horizon, the Kingdom also embodies a prophetic judgment of the derailments or “demonic” forces operating in history, in particular the forces of (fascist) nationalism, monopolistic capitalism, and collectivist Bolshevism. In trying to find a concrete historical agency carrying forward the transhistorical *telos*, Tillich invoked again the idea of “religious socialism,” seen now as an immanent warrant of a divinely transcendent purpose.²²

Tillich spelled out some of the more strategic implications of religiously socialist leanings roughly at the same time in an essay dealing with Christian churches and Marxism. As he pointed out, churches were, on the whole, quite ignorant of Marxist teachings; a first step therefore should be an effort to acquaint oneself with and “acquire an exact knowledge” of these teachings. Once this is done, it becomes possible to discern the ambivalent character of Marxism, that is, to distinguish the “enabling” and forward-looking aspects from the more sinister and “demonic” features. The latter features were obvious in Stalinist Bolshevism—and were almost exclusively stressed in public discussion. On the enabling side, however, a different picture emerges: Tillich believed that Christians actually could find allies in Marxists critical of fascist nationalism and exploitative capitalism. Viewed from this perspective, Marxism emerges as a “secularized and politicized form of Christian propheticism.” To be sure, a caveat needs to be observed: Christian propheticism can never be simply collapsed into an immanent movement, whether Marxist or communist or Christian socialist: “The practical strategy of the Church as a whole is a continuous attempt to make herself a representation and *anticipation* of the Kingdom of God and its righteousness.” Yet churches cannot simply abscond: they have to testify and give witness to the *promise* of the Kingdom here and now. To this extent, their task is to find the right (dialectical) balance between “religious reservation from history and religious obligation toward history.”²³

Such a balanced posture became particularly urgent with the onset of World War II in 1939. Throughout the war years, Tillich engaged himself actively on the side of the allied powers, given that their struggle was chiefly aimed at the defeat of fascism. As is well known, the theologian beamed a large number of radio messages across the ocean to Germany in the hope of weakening the Nazi regime.²⁴ However, one should also note certain distinctive accents in his perception of “war aims.” Above all, in Tillich’s view, the war was strictly a struggle against fascism—not a prelude to a global campaign against communism (represented at the time by the Soviet Union). Faithful to his Christian-socialist commitments, he hoped that the outcome of the war would lead to a cleansing of dominant ideologies in both the

West and the East, in the sense that capitalism would be cured of its monopolistic tendencies and Russian communism of its collectivist and antihumanist traits.²⁵ In the midst of his concrete engagements, to be sure, Tillich never forgot about necessary prophetic correctives in political life. A major articulation of propheticism can be found in his formulation of a set of “Protestant Principles” in 1942—a formulation that is dialectical through and through. Its starting point is that Protestantism affirms “the absolute majesty of God alone” and rejects any co-optation of the divine by worldly powers. At the same time, the statement opposes the expulsion of the divine from the world and hence the rigid “separation of a sacred from a secular realm.” All in all, while not endorsing any simple fusion or blending, Protestantism maintains the (dialectical) linkage of religion and culture and thus calls into question the dichotomy of “religious transcendence and cultural immanence.”²⁶

The end of World War II brought the defeat of Nazi Germany, which Tillich had actively promoted. But the aftermath also brought a stalemate between the superpowers and thus ushered in the prolongation of the conflict between liberal capitalism and communism that Tillich had feared. This prolongation was disappointing for him on many levels, especially with regard to his hopes for European and German reconstruction. As chairman of the Council for a Democratic Germany (established in 1944), Tillich argued for global détente, more specifically for cooperation between the West and Russia, as a necessary precondition for European revival and the rebuilding of Germany as a whole. The harsh realities of the ensuing Cold War put an end to these hopes.²⁷ In the midst of the immense tribulations of the period, Tillich found the time to write a thoughtful general assessment of the prevailing historical constellation under the title “The World Situation.” In its social and political analysis, the text in many ways was an updated version of *The Socialist Decision*. Despite the resounding defeat of German fascism, the world for Tillich was still in the throes of the familiar constellation of social forces and ideological doctrines, especially the clash between bourgeois-capitalist structures and various socialist or communist counterforces. As he wrote: The present world situation is “the outcome of the rise, the triumph, and the crisis of what we may

term 'bourgeois society.'” The development of that society occurred over several centuries and through a number of revolutions. Yet, precisely in its triumph or victory, bourgeois society has revealed its dialectical “underside,” that is, the “disintegration” of social life exemplified by class struggle, ethnic struggles, and other conflicts all over the world.²⁸

Although living at the time in the heartland of “bourgeois society,” Tillich was not reticent in his critique. In his view, there had been a breakdown of the foundation of that society, namely, “the conviction of automatic harmony between individual interest and the general interest.” What had become obvious was that the principle (of harmony) was true only to a limited degree and under especially favorable circumstances. These circumstances were not present in the context of monopoly capitalism. Various strategies have been attempted to remedy the problem, but most have ended in totalitarianism (fascist or communist). For Tillich, the imperative need of the “world situation” was to shun these false remedies without accepting the illness itself: that is, to avoid “both totalitarian absolutism and [extreme] liberal individualism.” In terms of economic organization, the basic question for him was this: “Shall humankind return to the monopolistic structure from which our present economic, political and psychological disintegration has resulted?” Or else this: “Shall humankind go forward to an integrated economy which is neither totalitarian nor in the service of war?” Here the idea of religious socialism resolutely makes its comeback. “Christianity,” Tillich writes, “must support plans for economic reorganization which promise to overcome the antithesis of [totalitarian] absolutism and [selfish] individualism”; it must insist “that the virtually infinite productive capacities of humankind shall be used for the advantage of everyone, instead of being restricted and wasted for the profit interests of a controlling minority.” Moving beyond the domestic economic context, Tillich’s text stressed the relevance of religious socialism also in the broad global arena by pointing a way beyond clashing national sovereignties. Just as a reflectively shared “way of life” was needed domestically, the cultivation of a “common spirit” also was required to sustain the world beyond exploitation and domination.²⁹

Religious Socialism or Barbarism

In its appeal to humankind, Tillich's text of 1945 was stirring and fully in accord with the demands of propheticism. Here is a sentence that deserves to be lifted up—and to be repeated and reaffirmed seventy years later: "Christianity must declare that, in the next period of history, those political forms are right which are able to produce and maintain a community in which chronic fear of a miserable and meaningless life for the masses is abolished, and in which everyone participates creatively in the self-realization of the community, whether local, national, regional, or international." What needs to be added is that, already in the cited text, Tillich did not entrust the fostering of a future community solely to Christian churches; in a genuinely "ecumenical" and even cosmopolitan spirit, he was ready to enlist other world religions and indeed all ethical orientations in the common global endeavor. As the conclusion of the text stated: "The Christian church can speak authoritatively and effectively in our world today only if it is truly 'ecumenical,' that is, universal."³⁰ One of the prominent features of the remaining decades of Tillich's life was precisely this ecumenical or cosmopolitan outreach, manifest in his growing preoccupation with the teachings of non-Western religious and philosophical traditions. A particularly noteworthy episode—somewhat unsettling for the Christian theologian—was his sustained encounter with Zen Buddhism. But this encounter was only one illustration of his broader engagement with the prospect of a future world community.³¹

During much of the postwar period, Tillich refrained again from actively participating in public life in his new homeland.³² In fact, he committed himself strongly, and almost exclusively, to his theological work, especially the elaboration of his *magnum opus*, *Systematic Theology* (whose first volume was published in 1951, its second in 1957, and its third and final volume in 1963). To be sure, devoting himself to theological work did not mean in Tillich's case a complete retreat from the world—something that would have gone against the very grain of his theology: his (dialectical) linkage of faith and culture. What his "systematic" work entailed was not a shunning of worldly ties but a strengthening of the prophetic dimension of genuine faith.

Thus the hope for a future world community was increasingly and emphatically couched in the language of prophetic expectation: the promise of the “Kingdom of God”—a promise that had been eloquently invoked in Tillich’s essay of 1938 in these words: “The Kingdom of God is the dynamic fulfillment of the ultimate meaning of existence against the contradictions [and demonic derailments] of existence.” The same promise had remained a recessed *leitmotiv* in all his later writings. It surged forth powerfully in the final part of the last volume of *Systematic Theology*, which carries the title “History and the Kingdom of God.”³³

As is clear from preceding discussions, the Kingdom of God and history in Tillich’s thought are linked in a tensional relation. Simply put: the Kingdom is not simply an event in worldly history, nor is it purely otherworldly: if it were part of history, it would lose its character as prophetic judgment; if it were otherworldly, it would lose its quality as a promise for humanity. Stressing his dialectical approach, Tillich writes: The Kingdom “has an inner-historical and a trans-historical side. As inner-historical, it participates in the dynamics of history; as trans-historical, it addresses the ambiguities of this dynamics.” Differently stated: the Kingdom holds immanence and transcendence in delicate balance. The same delicate balance is also captured in the expression “history of salvation,” an expression that points to “a sequence of events in which saving power breaks into historical processes—prepared for by these processes so that it can be received—changing them to enable the saving power to be effective in history.” In salvation history, sacred and secular dimensions converge in the sense that history shows its “self-transcending character,” its striving toward “ultimate fulfillment.” As Tillich concedes, the meeting of sacred and secular elements is not always salvific but can also lead to derailments, especially the absorption of the sacred by the “world.” Throughout the centuries, this has often happened in Christian churches. These churches, he states, “which represent the Kingdom of God in its fight against the forces of profanation and demonization, are themselves subject to the ambiguities of history and thus open to profanation and demonization.” Here resolute liberating struggles are needed and have been fought on many occasions: “Such fights can lead to reformation movements, and it is the fact

of such movements which gives the churches some right to consider themselves vehicles of the Kingdom of God, struggling in history.”³⁴

As should be clear, salvation history is not just the history of Christianity or Christian churches but the ultimate meaning of the history of humanity as a whole. Here Tillich returns to his deeper dialectical reflections (partly inspired by Schelling): on the distinction between essence and existence, between original “ground” and ultimate end. Seen in these terms, human history means the movement from the pure potency of “being” to steadily intensified existential actualization. This move to actuality, however, brings with it the countermove of ambiguity: the danger of “demonic” diremptions and derailments. This danger engenders the desire for a “return to origins”—but this return is blocked by the upsurge of the repressive (or “negative”) side of the origin. Hence, the salvific road is one of transformation through and beyond actuality, thus moving from original potency to a higher potency, from original enabling “being” to a purified or “New Being,” from “temporal” to “eternal life.” Once the Kingdom of God is viewed as the “end of history,” Tillich writes, one perceives that “the ever present ‘end of history’ elevates the positive [enabling] content of history into eternity at the same time that it excludes the negative [demonic] from participating in it. . . . Eternal life, then, includes the positive content of history, liberated from its negative distortions and fulfilled in its potentialities.” History here is general or universal “*human* history,” though with a prophetic proviso: “The transition from the temporal to the eternal, the ‘end’ of the temporal, is not a temporal event—just as creation is not a temporal event. Time is the form of the created finite, and eternity is the inner aim, the *telos* of creation, permanently elevating the finite into itself.”³⁵

The image of the Kingdom of God, as invoked by Tillich, is profoundly gripping and elevating. So is his portrayal of eternal or divine life—which he says is marked by “eternal blessedness,” though it is achieved through “fight and victory.” Before getting carried away by this portrayal, however, one should remember that Tillich was never an airy utopian neglectful of real-life calamities and experiences. The entire course of his life was overshadowed by dramatic calamities and “demonic” or near-demonic historical derailments. Thus in

his work the blessed life in the Kingdom is silhouetted against the backdrop of immensely destructive, life-denying forces, especially the Apocalyptic danger of the nuclear destruction of the world. Already at the end of World War II, Tillich joined the Commission on Christian Conscience and Weapons of Mass Destruction, a group that denounced as unacceptable and “demonic” the idea of launching “preventive war” in the absence of aggression. The commission also pleaded strongly against any “first use” of nuclear weapons and any military action that, in the unfolding Cold War, would drive the superpowers into nuclear confrontation.³⁶ In some of his own speeches and writings during the postwar period, Tillich rejected the idea of a “just” nuclear war, arguing that starting a war with the intent of using nuclear weapons was both illegitimate and foolish (because there can be no “winnable nuclear war”). In 1954, partly on the urging of the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), he wrote a forceful indictment of the “hydrogen bomb” that included these statements: “The increasing and apparently unlimited power of the means of self-destruction in human hands puts before us the question of the ultimate meaning of this development. . . . Everyone who is aware of the possibility of humankind’s self-destruction must resist this possibility to the utmost: For life and history have an eternal dimension.”³⁷

What emerges here, now on a global level, is the stark opposition evoked at the end of *The Socialist Decision*: the opposition between “socialism (religiously conceived) and barbarism.” The most stirring condemnation of the demonic conflict unleashed in our time was written by Tillich soon after the war, when the world was still under the immediate impact of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; it is called “The Shaking of the Foundations.” The text is preceded by citations from Jeremiah and Isaiah, especially this citation (Isaiah 24:18–19): “The foundations of the earth do shake. Earth breaks to pieces, is split into pieces, shakes to pieces. Earth reels like a drunken man, rocks like a hammock.” As Tillich comments: the prophets described with visionary power what a great number of human beings have experienced in our time and “what, perhaps in the not too distant future, all humankind will experience abundantly.” Thus the visions of the prophets have become “an actual, physical possibility,” and the phrase “Earth

is split into pieces” is not a poetic metaphor but “a hard reality” today: “This is the religious meaning of the age into which we have entered.” To be sure, there have always been destructive forces in the world, but in the past they were constrained and more than counter-balanced by enabling potencies. Thus the “unruly power” of the world was bound up by “cohesive structures”; the “fiery chaos of the beginning” was transformed into “the fertile soil of the earth.” But in modernity something happened: humankind has discovered the key to “unlock the forces of the ground,” that is, incredibly destructive forces. Human beings have subjected “the basis of life and thought to *their* will”—and they “willed destruction.” This is “why the foundations of the earth rock and shake in our time.”³⁸

To some extent, it was modern science that enabled humanity to unlock the “forces of the ground.” But, Tillich adds, it was not science as enabling knowledge, as self-critical inquiry. Rather, it was science wedded to a “hidden idolatry,” to a belief in the earth as “the place for the establishment of the Kingdom of God” and in ourselves as “the agents through whom this was to be achieved.” It was this idolatrous science, preaching the bliss of humanly fabricated “progress,” that gave to humanity “the power to annihilate itself and the world.” Unfortunately, preachers of earthly bliss usually find open or receptive ears, while prophetic voices pointing to dangers ahead tend to be shunned. Often prophetic voices are denounced as heralds of doom and sometimes even called disloyal or unpatriotic. However, Tillich asks, “Is it a sign of patriotism or of confidence in one’s people, its institutions and ways of life, to be silent when the foundations are shaking? Is the expression of optimism, whether justified or not, really more valuable than the expression of truth, even if the truth is deep and dark?” At this point, Tillich addresses himself directly to his readers and hearers, issuing an urgent wake-up call: “In which of these groups do you belong—among those who respond to the prophetic spirit, or among those who close their ears and hearts to it?” His text leaves no doubt about his own position and commitments. “In these days,” he concludes, when “the foundations of the earth *do* shake,” let us “*not* turn our eyes away; let us *not* close our ears and our mouths! But may we rather see, through the crumbling of a world, the rock of eternity and the salvation which has no end.”³⁹

Tillich's plea, I believe, still addresses us today. The dangers or calamities of which he warned have not ceased or disappeared; on the contrary, our world today is inundated with a massive avalanche of calamities and disasters. Wherever one looks, one finds turbulence, mayhem, orgies of bloodshed, an array of wars, proxy wars, hybrid wars. In the midst of all this, there is the emergence of something like a new Cold War, pitting against each other superpowers armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons in a confrontation in which the smallest miscalculation can produce apocalypse.⁴⁰ And behind this there is the division or "splitting" of the world into hostile classes, races, tribes, and religions. Do we not already hear the rumbling of the "shaking of the foundations"? In this situation, what will be our position? Will we close or open our hearts and minds? Are we still willing to listen to Tillich's summons? As we should note, Tillich's is a prophetic but also a gentle voice; it is not a shrill voice hankering for Armageddon. As Ronald Stone says correctly: Tillich maintained trust in the Kingdom of God which comes "through acts of truth, love, and caring commitment." His hope was not for the privileged and "exceptional" few but for a "reunion with God and *all* of creation." As far as worldly life in history is concerned (Stone adds), he continued to believe in "his vision of a moderate, democratic religious socialism." It was to him the best antidote to the mounting dangers of a new barbarism and also the most promising avenue toward justice and global peace if pursued with faithful expectation.⁴¹