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Before religious socialism: Tillich and social democracy in Wilhelmine Germany

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Abstract: Dieser Aufsatz ist eine stark kontextualisierte Studie von Paul Tillichs Verhältnis zur Sozialdemokratie vor dem ersten Weltkrieg. Entgegen seiner Behauptung, seine Generation sei vor dem Krieg politisch indifferent gewesen, zeichne ich das Bild einer Generation von Theologen, die sich mit Leidenschaft der zentralen politischen Herausforderung ihrer Generation widmeten: der sozialen Frage. Tillichs autobiographische Tendenz ist, den Krieg als sein alleiniges Moment der Offenbarung gesellschaftlicher und politischer Zusammenhänge zu charakterisieren. Die Quellen zeigen aber, dass er schon als Student und junger Pastor seine politische Meinung bildete und zum Ausdruck brachte. Schon vor dem Krieg vollzog Tillich eine erhebliche Entfernung von den konservativen Positionen seines Vaters. Er konnte mindestens zeitweise eine erstaunliche theologische Würdigung der Sozialdemokratie bieten, auch wenn reale Begegnungen mit den Arbeitern im industriellen Berlin ihn dann zu einer kritischeren Position bewegten. Damit wird aber deutlich, dass Tillichs späterer religiöser Sozialismus nicht als bloße Folge des Kriegs gedacht werden soll, sondern immer auch als teilweise Anknüpfung an frühere Spannungen seines werdenden politischen Denkens.

Keywords: Evangelisch-sozialer Kongreß, Freie kirchlich-soziale Konferenz, Friedrich Naumann, Johannes Tillich (The Father), Martin Kähler, Paul Tillich als Prediger, Reichstagswahl 1912, Religiöser Sozialismus, Religious Socialism, Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, Sozialismusphobie, Wilhelm Lüttger

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1 Introduction

1.1 The claim of political indifference

The story of Paul Tillich's political development – and development in general – has typically been told in a way which makes the First World War a cataclysmic revelatory experience and thus starting point for the study of Tillich's political theology.¹ Considering his task and experience as military chaplain at the Western Front, this is appropriate. Furthermore, Germany had fundamentally changed. Emerging from the other side of his chaplaincy, Tillich had to adjust to a new and rapidly developing political situation when he arrived back in Berlin.

However, the great role played by the war in the story either obscures or ignores developments before the war. For example, in the classic biography of Tillich written by Marion and Wilhelm Pauck, the change effected by the First World War is characterised most strikingly:

“At the beginning of the war Tillich was a shy, grown boy, truly a ‘dreaming innocent.’ He was a German patriot, a proud Prussian, as eager to fight for his country as anyone else, but politically naïve. When he returned to Berlin four years later he was utterly transformed. The traditional monarchist had become a religious socialist, the Christian believer a cultural pessimist, and the repressed puritanical boy a ‘wild man.’ These years represent *the* turning point in Paul Tillich's life – the first, last, and only one.”²

This before/after scheme is the fruit of the Paucks' personal connection to Tillich and reflects Tillich's own accounts. For in the process of writing, the Paucks recorded and took notes of conversations with him. In Tillich's earlier published autobiographical statements,³ he himself attributes great significance to the war for his life and specifically for his political stance. In “On the Boundary”, he writes:

1 For an impressive account of Tillich's religious socialism after the war, see Alf Christophersen, *Kairos. Protestantische Zeitdeutungskämpfe in der Weimarer Republik*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, Band 143. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008. For an older concise English account, see Ronald H. Stone, *Paul Tillich's Radical Social Thought*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1980.

2 Marion Pauck, Wilhelm Pauck, *Paul Tillich. His Life and Thought. Volume I: Life*. London: Collins, 1977, 41.

3 Tillich's first autobiographical writing was “On the Boundary.” In Idem, *The Interpretation of History*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, 1–73. The others are “Author's Preface.” In Idem, *The Protestant Era*, ed. James Luther Adams. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948; Idem, “Autobiographical Reflections.” In *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, ed. C. W. Kegley, R. W. Bretall. New York: MacMillan, 1952; and the first chapter of Idem, *My Search for Absolutes*, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967.

“Like most of the intellectuals of Germany before the War, my attitude toward politics had been essentially one of indifference. Neither did the ever-present consciousness of social guilt express itself in a political will. Only in the last year of the War, and in the months of collapse and revolution did the political backgrounds of the World War, the interrelation between Capitalism and Imperialism, the crisis of bourgeois society, the class cleavage, and so forth, become visible to me.”⁴

The claim that “most of the intellectuals before the war” had been indifferent to politics should, I believe, provoke scepticism. Even the briefest of glances at the broad shape of German politics in the decades before the First World War should leave one with the impression of intensive and impassioned political discussion among intellectuals. Even allowing for some hyperbole, Tillich’s characterisation of himself and his peers has the effect of obscuring the past.

Any earlier political positions become therein not a matter of proper conviction – not positions arrived at through debate and study – but an innocent blindness cured by revelatory existential crisis. Furthermore, attention is thereby drawn to the contrast of positions rather than the process of change. Rather than imagining Tillich conflicted or doubting, weighing the strengths and weaknesses of opposing positions, we are led to think of him merely subject to an inchoate “social guilt”.⁵

This is not to attribute a deceptive intention to Tillich’s narrative. For it is surely a common characteristic of autobiographical accounts that authors stylise and simplify. Yet the strangeness of Tillich’s statement of indifference awakens interest in a more accurate understanding of Tillich’s early political development. This essay explores just this question by paying close attention to the various sources from before the war.

1.2 The claim to have stood on the left

Even within that 1936 autobiographical sketch “On the Boundary”, there is a statement contradicting his claim to have been politically indifferent. For he mentions that when he was old enough to vote (i. e. 25 years of age), he decided to stand “on the side of the political Left, even though the strongest conservative traditions had to be defied. It was a protest against political heteronomy [...]”.⁶

⁴ Tillich, “On the Boundary” [1936], 19. The same sentiment is expressed in 1952: “it required a world war and a political catastrophe before I was able to [...] affirm belief in democratic ideals and the social revolution.” Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections”, 7 f.

⁵ On social guilt born of relationships with working-class childhood friends, see Tillich, “On the Boundary” [1936], 8 f.

⁶ Tillich, “On the Boundary” [1936], 29.

This remark about a pre-war political decision, which must refer to the parliamentary elections (*Reichtagswahl*) of 1912, suggests Tillich voted for either the SPD or a left-liberal party such as the FVP (I will later suggest the latter), and contradicts the statement about political indifference.⁷ Can one be indifferent and protest? Can one be indifferent while defying “the strongest conservative traditions”? There is a puzzling inconsistency regarding Tillich’s political stance in his autobiography, which to my knowledge has not yet been explored.⁸

Ronald Stone, writing before the archival material from Tillich’s student days was published, concludes that for Tillich’s student days “there is no evidence of formal instruction in the social problems of contemporary Germany or realization of the need for a theological critique of the complacency of Wilhelmine society.”⁹ It is true that Tillich did not attend lectures concerning politics. However, in contrast to Stone and the narrative of the Paucks, in this essay I show that it is wrong to call him politically naïve, or to think he was entirely uncritical of the status quo before the war. I argue that before the war Tillich exhibited significant and continued engagement with what was arguably the central political issue of his time: the social question. This did not yet make him a “religious socialist”, but by the time the war started, he had already travelled a considerable way from his conservative roots to occupy what might one call a centrist or left-liberal position.

To make my case that Tillich had undergone significant political development before the war, this essay offers a strong contextualisation of the early Tillich by explaining at some length the debates around the social question in Wilhelmine Germany. This is necessary in order to make sense of the statements Tillich makes. For statements which may now seem bland may at a particular time have been daring or shocking.

I start with the two relevant contexts for Tillich’s early life: the university (section 2) and the Prussian church (section 3). These contexts provide the

7 Talk of being on the ‘left’ became common in Germany during and following the revolutions of 1848 as marking those in opposition to those conservative and reactionary figures on the “right”. See Rudolf Vierhaus, “Konservativ, Konservatismus.” In *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. O. Brunner, W. Conze, R. Koselleck, Band 3. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982, 531–565, here 559. Therefore the term could be interpreted as denoting either a liberal or a social-democratic party affiliation.

8 Ronald H. Stone mentions Tillich’s exposure to the conditions of workers in his ministry in Berlin 1912–1914. However, he does not mention this tension in the autobiography, and, like the Paucks, simply brands Tillich naïve. See Stone, *Paul Tillich’s Radical Social Thought*, 20. I mentioned his political turn by 1912 briefly in Samuel Shearn, *Pastor Tillich: The justification of the doubter*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, 33.

9 Stone, *Paul Tillich’s Radical Social Thought*, 22.

general backdrop against which Tillich's earliest statements can be understood. Then I sketch an account of Tillich's specific and personal context: the political stance of his university teachers (section 4) and his father (section 5).

With this considerable contextualisation in place, I survey first the evidence in statements from Tillich's time as a student 1905–1909 (section 6), and then those sources from his various spells as a pastor, doctoral candidate or post-doc, 1909–1914 (section 7). I show that while Tillich was not a social democrat before the war, in a student essay he made a daring theological defence of the social democratic movement. In contrast, his sermons in Lichtenrade 1909 were pietist and quietist. Yet following his intensive period of studying Schelling, his sermons as a curate in Nauen 1911–12 included criticism of conservative aloofness and offered a charitable defence of the nobility of social democratic concerns, in contexts where provincial conservatism held sway. Nevertheless, living in proximity with the working class in industrial Berlin-Moabit 1912–13, Tillich retreated from his striking theological affirmations of social democracy and was engaged in church apologetics, opposing the anti-church sentiments of social democrats, committing them to God's mercy, while expressing a centrist position.

2 Socialism and Academia in Wilhelmine Germany

2.1 The rise of social democracy

The long process of industrialisation in the nineteenth century went hand in hand with the desperate economic situation of large parts of the fast-growing population.¹⁰ Many felt that in the wake of industrialisation the social fabric of society had been damaged, and that the inequalities in society, in particular the poverty in large cities, required a creative answer. Combined with the thought that this situation might be changed by political action, a belief forged in the wake of the French Revolution, there emerged what became known as the social question. As consciousness of the class divide grew and workers began to organise themselves, first socialist groups began to make their voices heard. In 1863, Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864) founded the first German workers' party, the *Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverein*. In 1869, Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826–1900)

¹⁰ For an overview of factors worsening the situation of the increasingly urbanised workers, see Martin Friedrich, *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch. Das 19. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006, 224–228.

founded the *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiter Partei* (SDAP).¹¹ These two joined in 1875 to form the found the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SAP) and gained 12 of the 397 seats in the 1877 *Reichstag* elections.

With the memory of the revolutions of 1848 in the background, the German government, led by Chancellor Bismarck, maintained a strongly anti-socialist position. In 1878 Kaiser Wilhelm I survived two assassination attempts. The assumption was made that socialists were behind the attacks, so the government and press attacked them.¹² A Socialist Law (*Sozialistengesetz*) was swiftly passed that same year which made illegal any attempt to gather or organize oneself in a socialist club or union, publish socialist material, or give assistance to those doing so (booksellers and landlords were threatened with losing their licences).¹³

The SAP was still allowed to stand for elections but was not allowed to either raise funds or campaign officially. But despite these drastic measures against the party, they were able to increase the number of seats they held in the Reichstag from 12 seats in 1877 to 35 seats in 1890. Indeed in 1890, rebranded as the Social-Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), they received nearly 20% of the popular vote.

The rise in popularity of the SPD and socialist ideas in general among the industrialised working classes meant that politicians could not exclusively rely on authoritarian ‘othering’ of such groups, as much as they tried. The government saw that new laws had to be passed which would benefit the worst-off. Thus, over the course of the 1880s and 1890s, regulation of the workplace improved. Several new types of social insurance were introduced, including a basic national insurance, health insurance, accident insurance, and disability insurance, even if it was not straightforward to get payment out of such schemes.¹⁴

However, at the heart of the demands of the SPD was not just an improved condition of the workers but political influence and self-determination. Though the Socialist Law was not renewed in 1890, fear of revolution reigned among

¹¹ Because it was seen as a contrast to bourgeois democratic politics, “in the spreading preferment of the double-term [social democracy] [...] one can recognise the beginnings of a political self- and class-consciousness of the workers.” Wolfgang Schieder, “Sozialismus.” In *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. O. Brunner, W. Conze, R. Koselleck, Band 5. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984, 923–996, here 973.

¹² The nation fell into “a state of hysteria, in which sympathy for the wounded monarch took ugly forms.” Gordon A. Craig, *Germany 1866–1945*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, 145. Some were imprisoned for casual satirical remarks about the Kaiser.

¹³ See Craig, *Germany 1866–1945*, 145.

¹⁴ For a detailed account of these new social laws and their implementation, see Sandrine Kott, *Sozialstaat und Gesellschaft: Das deutsche Kaiserreich in Europa*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.

the strong conservative contingent in the Reichstag.¹⁵ During the 1890s several attempts were made to pass laws which would somehow limit socialist activity, but they were often, if not always, defeated. The popularity of the SPD was undiminished. By 1912, the SPD had 110 seats in the Reichstag, the largest group of any party, and had gained 34% of the popular vote. In 1913 workers' unions close to the SPD had 2.5 million members, when Germany's population was around 65 million.¹⁶ Tillich grew up at a time when the political landscape was being transformed by the rise of social democracy.

2.2 Prussian universities in the Althoff era

The government's stance in this period helps understand the world of universities into which Tillich entered as a student at the end of 1904. The German university system prided itself on its academic freedom which meant the ideal of academic self-governance, the freedom of students to choose which lectures to attend, and the freedom of professors to offer those courses they wished to give.¹⁷ However, in practice, the freedom to speak one's mind on political issues was seriously

¹⁵ The voting down of the attempt to make the *Sozialistengesetz* permanent in 1890 should not be interpreted as a great change of stance in parliament, since the conservatives joined the liberals in voting against the resolution. Their opposition stemmed from their uncompromising stance that the law did not go far enough. Craig comments: "The national liberals reacted by intimating that they would support such legislation only if the provisions that authorised the police to expel persons from their homes on suspicion of subversion were deleted. This was countered by a conservative insistence that the power of expulsion was a *sine qua non*." Craig, *Germany 1866–1945*, 173.

¹⁶ See Friedrich, *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*, 258.

¹⁷ See Craig, *Germany 1966–1945*, 199. The self-understanding of the universities as bastions of freedom had been forged in the fires of the censorship experienced by Kant and others in 1790s, and given its definitive expression at the founding of the university of Berlin in 1809–10 by Schleiermacher, Fichte and Humboldt. Humboldt had said: "What one calls higher scientific institutes is free from all form [i. e. shaping] in the state, [is] nothing other than the intellectual life of the people, which is led by external leisure or internal striving to science and research." Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Ueber die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin." In Idem, *Werke in fünf Bänden, Band 4: Schriften zur Politik und zum Bildungswesen*, ed. Andreas Flitner, Klaus Giel. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010, 255–265, here 256.

restricted.¹⁸ For a professor in Prussia, criticising the government's views on sensitive matters made one's life and career progress much more difficult.¹⁹

In the 1880s, under the glare of the Socialist Law, a professor would not dare to say anything which would indict. However, even after the renewal of the law was voted down in 1890, to be a university teacher and a socialist was almost impossible. Prussian higher education policy was dominated between 1882 and 1907 by one man, Friedrich Theodor Althoff (1839–1908).²⁰ Under his reign, expressing social democratic views continued to make your chances of promotion dwindle, or even stop you from gaining a first teaching post. For example, pressure was put on the physics faculty at the University of Berlin to remove lecturer Leo Arons in 1896–7 for his socialist activism. When the faculty did not bend to political pressure, a law was duly passed in 1898 to make membership of the SPD incompatible with academia.²¹ Even after Althoff retired, in Prussia it was not even possible to begin a *Habilitation* if you belonged

18 Between 1871 and 1908 government spending on higher education increased fourfold. Craig sees this as a factor reducing academic freedom: “since there was a natural tendency to avoid jeopardising grants of support by refusing to make concessions to government views about how the grants should be used and, by extension, how the university should be governed. The government had to confirm the choice of the university's rector, and it also appointed professors – usually, although not necessarily, from faculty nominees; so there was in any case plenty of opportunity for government pressure, and, when there was a strong minister of education, it was apt to be exerted.” Craig, *Germany 1866–1945*, 200.

19 The cases of military historian Hans Delbrück (1848–1929) and sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) serve as examples of the kinds of pressure one could come under if one's political views were not in line with the Prussian government (see Craig, *Germany 1866–1945*, 201). Apart from the disapproval his revisionary military history yielded, Delbrück had to account for his criticism of the police and foreign policy. See Christoph Nottmeier, *Adolf von Harnack und die deutsche Politik 1890–1930. Eine biographische Studie zum Verhältnis von Protestantismus, Wissenschaft und Politik*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, Band 124. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 150 f. For a brief biography of Delbrück in English see Arden Bucholz's introduction in Hans Delbrück, *Modern Military History*, ed. and transl. by Arden Bucholz. Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997, 1–37. Tönnies was denied a professorship until 1909 because of his social democratic sympathies; see Uwe Carstens, *Ferdinand Tönnies. Friese und Weltbürger. Eine Biographie*. Zweite Auflage, Bräist, Bredstedt: Nordfriisk Instituut, 2013, 85–194.

20 Friedrich Althoff was Prussian *Universitäts- und Bibliotheksreferent*, 1882–1897. He was then promoted to the post of ministerial director of education (overseeing both schools and universities), until his retirement in 1907.

21 See Craig, *Germany 1866–1945*, 201 f. For more examples of persecution of academics under Althoff, and of the politically motivated placement of new professors against faculty wishes, see Konrad H. Jarausch, *Students, Society and Politics in Imperial Germany. The Rise of Academic Illiberalism*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1982, 172–174.

to the SPD, as the case of Robert Michels from 1908 demonstrates.²² The worry ran deep that a subversive professor would ruin the youth and destroy the fabric of the nation.

3 Socialism and the Protestant Church

3.1 Wichern and Stoecker

The process of industrialisation and the great increase in population was a challenge to the Protestant church which Tillich would later serve. Many individuals had responded positively but locally to that challenge.²³ Probably the best known of these is Johann Hinrich Wichern (1808–1881). His *Raues Haus* ('rough' or 'raw' house) in Hamburg (founded 1833) combined provision of material needs for children, a concern for their general education, but also an effort of catechesis and evangelism, since he believed real progress was only possible when children knew about their need of redemption.²⁴ Wichern's speech at the Wittenberg *Kirchentag* in September 1848 was a key moment because it was a catalyst for the church's response to the social question at an institutional level: The Central Committee for Inner Mission was founded 1849.

This institutional response was also a response to the revolutions of 1848 and driven by a sense that the rise of socialist thought and communism were a threat to the stability of society and the monarchy, which also meant a threat to the privileged position of the Protestant church in Germany. "Opposition to socialism [...] constituted the theoretical framework of the Inner Mission and made its support by the state possible."²⁵ Social democracy was to be vilified,

²² Michels was in Marburg, not Prussia, but Max Weber, writing in 1908 to lament the lack of academic freedom, says that Michels would have "no chance of doing this [starting a *Habilitation*] in Prussia because of the application of the 'lex Arons'." Max Weber, "The alleged 'academic freedom' at German Universities." In *Max Weber's Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations*, ed. John Dreijmanis, trans. Gordon C. Wells. New York: Algora Publishing, 2007, 64–68, here 65.

²³ Martin Friedrich rightly points out that it was not only the *Erweckungsbewegung* which fostered the development of a social Protestantism. Christians of a more "enlightened" and rationalist persuasion were also involved in the development of initiatives to help the poor and sick; see Friedrich, *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*, 228. However, it is telling that so many of his examples of leading figures can be reckoned to that Pietist tradition.

²⁴ See Friedrich, *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*, 230 f.

²⁵ Friedrich, *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*, 246. However, it should be pointed out that the term socialism, while here used to denote socialist parties influenced by thinkers such as

outbid by practical Christian love, and driven back by evangelism. Furthermore, if we consider the Lutheran tradition, with its strong affirmation of political authority, it is tempting to see a certain inevitability in the Protestant church's deep antipathy toward anything that sounded like revolution. The feelings were mutual. The SPD saw the church as a great obstacle to political progress and pressed for the full separation of church and state.²⁶ Thus fear of socialism characterised the mainstream Protestant church in the second half of the nineteenth Century.²⁷

With the exception of a failed attempt to ban work on Sundays, the Inner Mission did not attempt to campaign for changes to social policy.²⁸ The politically cautious approach of the Inner Mission was not shared by all. Awareness of the need to address the material causes of deprivation as well as their symptoms drove prominent pastor Adolf Stoecker (1835–1909) to found the *Christlich-soziale Arbeiterpartei* in 1878, renamed *Christlich-soziale Partei* (CSP) in 1881.²⁹ The manifesto was Christian, monarchist and nationalist but contained plans for laws to protect workers, and advocated progressive taxation, in competition with the SPD. Yet the party was essentially conservative and reactionary, designed as

Marx, was something of a wax nose. Wichern was opposed to socialism in the mentioned sense, but at the same time could talk of desiring “a Christian socialism, of which the French [version] is only a caricature.” Johann Hinrich Wichern, “Die Revolution und die Innere Mission (1848).” In Idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Friedrich Mahling, Band 3. Hamburg: Rauhes Haus, 1902, 205. Cited in Schieder, “Sozialismus”, 969.

26 Martin Friedrich says that with the 1891 Erfurt Programme (i. e. Manifesto) of the SPD “animosity toward Christianity became [...] party doctrine”. Friedrich, *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*, 257. However, this is not the case. The programme repeated the Gotha Programme of 1875 in saying religion is a private matter, and merely clarified in 1891 that this entailed that the state should not fund churches and religious organisations, or the church be involved in children's education. The SPD was certainly opposed the church's status quo, but not to Christianity as a matter of party policy, even if many key SPD figures, such as August Bebel (1840–1913), were publicly scathing about Christianity.

27 Martin Friedrich calls this “Sozialismusphobie” in *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*, 248.

28 Victor Aimé Huber (1800–1869) demanded that the Inner Mission do more to change social policy, but found himself sidelined as a result. See Friedrich, *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*, 247; see also Eike Baumann, “Victor Aimé Huber (1800–1869). Erweckter Protestantismus, Konservatismus und Genossenschaftstheorie.” In *Diakonissen – Unternehmer – Pfarrer. Sozialer Protestantismus in Mitteldeutschland im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Sebastian Kranich. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlags-Anstalt, 2009, 59–74.

29 For a biography of Stoecker see Grit Koch, *Adolf Stoecker, 1835–1909. Ein Leben zwischen Politik und Kirche*. Erlangen: Palm & Enke, 1993. See also Martin Greschat, Werner Jochmann (eds.), *Protestantismus und Politik. Werk und Wirkung Adolf Stoeckers*, *Hamburger Beiträge zur Sozial- und Zeitgeschichte*, Band 17. Hamburg: Christians, 1982.

a bastion against the SPD and liberalism of any colour. Furthermore, Stoecker's polemics were full of antisemitic narratives.³⁰

Stoecker's party remained very small, "little else than a middleclass faction, without real conscious aim or program."³¹ Indeed, the parliamentary election results of February 1890 confirmed that social democracy was not going to disappear; voices within the church demanding a more political response began to be taken more seriously.

3.2 The Evangelisch-soziale Kongress

Following the results of the election, church authorities issued a call to its ministers in April 1890 to "wherever possible" talk to the workers in their parish and banish misconceptions of the church.³² Spurred on by the church's call, in May 1890 the *Evangelisch-soziale Kongress* (ESK) was founded.³³ The mission of the ESK was

[...] to investigate without prejudice the social conditions of our people, measure them against the standard of the ethical and religious demands of the gospel and make these more fruitful and effective than before."³⁴

30 Stoecker gained a seat in the Reichstag in 1881. Both "he and Wagner combined attention to progressive social policy with monarchism and voracious anti-semitism; "Stoecker declared that money to cure social problems should be taken from wealthy Jews [...]." Harold M. Green, "Adolf Stoecker: Portrait of a Demagogue." *Politics & Policy* 31/1 (2003): 106–129, here 112. See also Martin Greschat, "Sozialer Protestantismus und Anti-Semitismus: Adolf Stoecker." In *Sozialer Protestantismus im Kaiserreich. Problemkonstellationen – Lösungsperspektiven – Handlungsprofile*, ed. Norbert Friedrich, Traugott Jähnichen. Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005, 37–52.

31 Hermann Kutter, *They must; or God and the Social Democracy. A frank word to Christian men and women*, ed. Rufus W. Weeks. Chicago: Co-operative Printing Company, 1908, 17.

32 Ev. Oberkirchenrat, "Ansprache des ev. Oberkirchenrats an die Geistlichen. 17.4.1890." In *Staat und Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Dokumente zur Geschichte des deutschen Staatskirchenrechts*, ed. Ernst R. Huber, Wolfgang Huber, Band 3. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1990, 696–697.

33 Important studies on the church's more political response to the social question, particularly through the ESK, include Manfred Schick, *Kulturprotestantismus und soziale Frage. Versuche zur Begründung der Sozialethik, vornehmlich in der Zeit von der Gründung des Evangelisch-sozialen Kongresses bis zum Ausbruch des 1. Weltkrieges (1890–1914)*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1970; E. I. Kouri, *Der deutsche Protestantismus und die soziale Frage 1870–1919. Zur Sozialpolitik im Bildungsbürgertum*. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1984; and Gangolf Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus und Politik. Zum Verhältnis von Liberalismus und Protestantismus im wilhelminischen Deutschland*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1994.

34 *Evangelisch-Sozialer Kongress, Bericht über die Verhandlungen des 2. Evangelisch-sozialen*

The desire to be intellectually rigorous in addressing problems was serious and bore fruit. However, despite the scientific language of “investigate without prejudice”, anti-socialism and confessional polemics were constitutive elements of the *raison d'être* of the ESK, as had been with the Inner Mission. The invitation to the first meeting spoke of the

“[...] threatening danger [...] in the growth of social democracy and its increasing alienation from the church [...]. As Rome unfolds more energetic propaganda in the social area, so much stronger is the duty placed upon faithful Protestants to gather the powers of their church and steer them towards the social question [...].”³⁵

Both conservative and liberal Protestant theologians belonged to the group of founders of the ESK, but they were politically conservative, that is, united in their love for the Kaiser and the fear that society was going to break apart.³⁶ The theological tension between figures like Adolf Stoecker and Adolf von Harnack would have been apparent from the start. However, there was also a more practical tension since Stoecker wanted a more political and practical organisation while Harnack thought the congress was more about being a sober and academic place to “expound and clarify social questions and problems”.³⁷ It is noteworthy to see that theological conservatism “was not simply anti-social; it could, in its most able representatives, even have open eyes for that which was justified in social democracy”.³⁸

Within the ESK, the desire for more political activism grew among some younger liberal theologians such as pastors Friedrich Naumann (1860–1919) and

Kongresses. Berlin: Wiegandt, 1891, 126, cited in Schick, *Kulturprotestantismus und soziale Frage*, 76.

³⁵ *Evangelisch-Sozialer Kongreß, Bericht über die Verhandlungen des 1. Evangelisch-sozialen Kongresses*. Berlin: Wiegandt, 1890, 2, cited in Schick, *Kulturprotestantismus und soziale Frage*, 77.

³⁶ For example, the group included the politician and editor of the very conservative *Neue Preußische Zeitung*, Hermann Kropatschek (1847–1906), which would regularly denounce liberal theologians, but on the other hand, the likes of Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) and Friedrich Naumann (1860–1919) were also heavily involved. Today we tend not to think of theological liberals as expressing conservative political views, Harnack was however a prime example; see Schick, *Kulturprotestantismus und soziale Frage*, 6. Both political and theological liberalism experienced “a crisis [...] as it became increasingly clear that the liberal idea of the autonomous individual seemed to lead to social fragmentation and bureaucratization.” Mark Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology: Religion and Cultural Synthesis in Wilhelmine Germany*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 7.

³⁷ *Evangelisch-Sozialer Kongreß, Bericht über die Verhandlungen des 7. Evangelisch-sozialen Kongresses*. Berlin: Wiegandt, 1896, 7, cited in Schick, *Kulturprotestantismus und soziale Frage*, 80.

³⁸ Schick, *Kulturprotestantismus und soziale Frage*, 131 f.

Paul Göhre (1864–1928), who were particularly sympathetic to the situation of the workers and their political aims.

Naumann spent significant years of his early career serving the poor in industrial Germany. For after his theology degree, he had worked at Wichern's Raues Haus in Hamburg, and also worked for the Inner Mission in Frankfurt. Naumann desired to make connections between the liberal and the social democratic elements in opposition to the conservative parties including Stoecker's anti-semitic CSP, eventually became a liberal politician, founding the *National-sozialer Verein*, a Christian social and liberal (also: nationalist, colonialist, proto-feminist) party,³⁹ which eventually merged with others to become the leading liberal party FVP. He continued to work with the ESK.⁴⁰

Paul Göhre, the founding general secretary of the ESK, was also practical and political. He was made famous by his social experiment and 1891 book *Three Months in a Workshop*⁴¹ and caused a storm by criticising certain landowners from Ostelbien at the ESK meeting of 1894. In response to events like this, in December 1895 the Prussian church banned its ministers from taking part in socialist political meetings.⁴²

Göhre's response to the inertia of the church and the older members of the ESK was to found the National-sozialer Verein with Naumann in 1896. But in 1900 he joined the SPD, finally leaving the church in 1903, encouraging others to follow suit.⁴³ Those taking part in the ESK were mostly pastors and theology students who hailed from bourgeois families, to whom "revolution and downfall was the horror of all horrors."⁴⁴ Thus, though coming from the heart of an organisation set up to undermine the SPD, Göhre had gone over to the enemy, but, he said, "for the sake of my Christianity".⁴⁵

39 Naumann dreamed of the working-class masses filled with national sentiment, fighting for better working conditions and achieving social reform, and for more rights for women. See Friedrich Naumann, *National-sozialer Katechismus. Erklärung der Grundlinien des National-Sozialen Vereins*. Berlin: Buchverlag der "Zeit", Bousset und Kundt, 1897.

40 Klaus-Erich Pollmann, "Friedrich Naumann und der Evangelisch-soziale Kongreß." In *Friedrich Naumann in seiner Zeit*, ed. Rüdiger vom Bruch. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2000, 49–64.

41 Paul Göhre, *Three Months in a Workshop. A Practical Study*, trans. A. B. Carr. London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895. The German original was published in 1891.

42 Not, that is, from taking part in the ESK. But the signal to the leadership of the ESK was clear. See Friedrich, *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*, 264.

43 See Friedrich, *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*, 265. For a detailed study of Göhre's fascinating life, see Joachim Brenning, *Christentum und Sozialdemokratie. Paul Göhre, Fabrikarbeiter, Pfarrer, Sozialdemokrat, eine sozialethisch-historische Untersuchung*. Diss. Universität Marburg, 1980.

44 Schick, *Kulturprotestantismus und soziale Frage*, 128.

45 Paul Göhre, *Wie ein Pfarrer Sozialdemokrat wurde. Eine Rede von Paul Göhre*. 2. Auflage.

3.3 The Freie Kirchlich-soziale Kongress

Practical, theological differences and personal controversy precipitated a group of conservative theologians led by Stoecker to separate themselves from the ESK and form the *Freie Kirchlich-soziale Konferenz* (FKSK), which met for the first time in 1897. The FKSK worked with a “positive” (i. e., conservative theological, anti-liberal) confession of faith.⁴⁶ After the split, the ESK was a broadly liberal theological organisation such that the *Neue Preußische Zeitung* could write in 1912 with vitriol that in the ESK had “degenerated into a *deutschfreisinnigen* tournament for the politicians of the *Christliche Welt*”,⁴⁷ that influential liberal theological newspaper edited by Martin Rade (1857–1940). For theological conservatives, the ESK had lost its lustre.

However, it was not merely a matter of theological difference. Under Stoecker the FKSK was a voice for more explicit political activism. Stoecker’s exit from the ESK coincided with a political break of Stoecker’s party with the German national conservative party, of which it had been a member group. Kaiser Wilhelm II, who had already relieved Stoecker of his duties as court preacher in 1890 because of his political activism, now publicly criticised Stoecker again in 1896, saying that pastors should take care of the souls in their churches, love their neighbours, but leave politics alone.⁴⁸

Thus, analogous to those in the politically left-wing fringe of the theologically liberal ESK, like Naumann and Göhre, the theological conservatism of the FKSK did not hinder positions being put forward from the podium which showed some affinity with the SPD. The founding documents of Stoecker’s CSP,⁴⁹ and his earlier speeches, are full of malignment and a disparaging tone toward social

Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1900, 6.

⁴⁶ Friedrich, *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch*, 264. For more on the split, see Schick, *Kulturprotestantismus und soziale Frage*, 91–95.

⁴⁷ “NPZ, 12.06.1912”. In “Preßstimmungen zur Essener Tagung.” *Evangelisch-sozial* 9. Jg. (1912), cited in Schick, *Kulturprotestantismus und soziale Frage*, 81. *Freisinnig* could be translated ‘free-thinking’ but here refers to a variety of left-wing liberal parties, some of whose names included “this adjective at various times. In 1912 it would have been referring to those sympathetic to the *Fortschrittliche Volkspartei* (FVP), recently formed as a merger of various smaller parties.

⁴⁸ See “Telegramm Wilhelms II. an den Geheimen Oberregierungsrat Dr. Georg Hinzpeter,” 28.2.1896. In Wolfgang Ayaß (hg.), *Abteilung III: Ausbau und Differenzierung der Sozialpolitik seit Beginn des neuen Kurses (1890–1904), Band 1: Grundfragen der Sozialpolitik*. Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 2016, 467.

⁴⁹ The 1878 programme rejected social democracy as “unpractical, unchristian and unpatriotic”; “Programm der Christlich-Sozialen Arbeiterpartei,” Berlin, Januar 1878. In *Adolf Stoecker als Antisemit, Teil 2: Texte des Kirchenmannes und Parteipolitikers*, ed. Günter Brakelmann. Waltrop: Hartmut Spinner, 2004, 8.

democrats. But twenty years later, his 1901 address to the FKSK, *Kann ein Christ Sozialdemokrat, kann ein Sozialdemokrat Christ sein?* emphasised that the party programme of the SPD need not be understood as entirely anti-Christian. The Christian should affirm some key practical demands made. There is much, he says, which is justified, good and beautiful about the programme of the SPD.⁵⁰

However, Stoecker was still an enemy of the SPD, but he was forced to respond to that fact that meanwhile, not only godless working class church members had become SPD members, but even some pastors like Göhre and Christoph Blumhardt (1842–1919), had followed suit.⁵¹ For Stoecker, Christianity and social democracy remained fundamentally opposed and social democratic utopian and materialistic understandings of history are wrong. Stoecker explains those Christians who become SPD members with lack of theological reflection on the part of the laity and theological error or liberalism on the part of the pastors. Stoecker's FKSK understood itself and the Christian workers' movement it organized as an alternative to the SPD.⁵²

3.4 Swiss religious socialism in Germany

The abovementioned Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt joined the SPD in 1899 and became a local politician in Württemberg. He (alongside English and other German Christian social-democratic thinkers) was a significant influence on the Swiss religious socialist movement and their two most prominent figures, Hermann Kutter (1863–1931) and Leonhard Ragaz (1868–1945),⁵³ who in turn inspired Karl Barth and also several Germans with their writings⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ Adolf Stoecker, *Kann ein Christ Sozialdemokrat, kann ein Sozialdemokrat Christ sein?* [1901], Hefte der freien kirchlich-sozialen Konferenz, Band 19. 2. Auflage. Leipzig, Erlangen: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Dr. Werner Scholl, 1920.

⁵¹ For an accessible overview of Blumhardt's political turn, and subsequent withdrawal from politics, see Simeon Zahl, *Pneumatology and Theology of the Cross in the Preaching of Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt: The Holy Spirit between Wittenberg and Azusa Street*. London: T&T Clark, 2010, 111–129.

⁵² See for example in 1907 the words of FKSK chairman, Dietrich von Oertzen (1849–1935), underlining that only such Christian social movements could effectively oppose social democracy. See Wilhelm Lütgert, *Was heißt christliche Arbeiterbewegung?*, Hefte der freien kirchlich-sozialen Konferenz, Band 42. Berlin: Vaterländische Verlags- und Kunstanstalt, 1908, 3–13.

⁵³ Louis Specker, "Christoph Blumhardts Einfluss auf die Schweiz (zweiter Teil und Schluss)." *Neue Wege: Beiträge zu Religion und Sozialismus* 95 (2001): 40–47. See also Markus Mattmüller, *Leonhard Ragaz und der religiöse Sozialismus. Eine Biographie, Band 1: Die Entwicklung der Persönlichkeit und des Werkes bis ins Jahr 1913*. Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag Zollikon, 1957.

⁵⁴ One striking example being Eberhard Arnold. See Markus Baum, *Against the Wind*. Eberhard

Kutter, for example, stridently criticises those like Stoecker and Naumann who in different ways attempted to create Christian alternatives to the social democratic movement. Mere social reform is not enough. Christians should join in the criticism of capitalism and expose the church's surrender to Mammon, for God is revealing himself in the social democratic movement:

"The despised of all people to-day are the Social Democrats. I am tempted to believe that there is to-days revelation of God [...]. The Social Democrats hunger and thirst after righteous conditions. Is that godlessness? The Social Democrats are the advocates of mercy. And shall they not then obtain mercy? The Social Democrats hate what is common, base and greedy. And shall they not be God's children? They are despised and persecuted on all sides. And shall God condemn them to hell? They lay up for themselves no treasures on earth, and declare war on money-getting. And shall they not belong to God?"⁵⁵

In just this vein, before his eschewal of any theology of culture, Karl Barth could say in 1911 that the social democratic movement was "not only the greatest and most penetrating word of God to the present, but also in particular a direct development of that spiritual power which entered history and life through Jesus."⁵⁶

It is beyond the scope of this essay to offer a detailed account of the Swiss religious socialists. But we should note the attribution of revelatory significance and interpretation of the apparently anti-Christian social democrats as true Christians.⁵⁷

For Tillich's context in Berlin, the witness of Günther Dehn (1882–1970) is especially pertinent. Dehn was a young minister in Berlin when Tillich became his colleague in Berlin-Moabit 1912–13. Dehn had by then already become enamoured with the writings of the Swiss religious socialists Kutter and Ragaz, the latter of whom he had met in Switzerland.⁵⁸

Arnold and the Bruderhof. Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 1998, 67–69.

⁵⁵ Hermann Kutter, *They must; or God and the social democracy. A frank word to Christian men and women*, ed. Rufus W. Weeks. Chicago: Co-operative Printing Company, 1908. This is the English translation of the German original from 1903.

⁵⁶ "[...] daß die soziale Bewegung des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts nicht nur das größte und eindringlichste Wort Gottes an die Gegenwart ist, sondern im Besondern ein ganz direkter Forttrieb der, wie ich sagte, mit Jesus in die Geschichte und ins Leben getretenen Geisteskraft." Karl Barth, "Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung, 1911." In *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe. Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909–1914*, ed. Hans-Anton Drewes, Hinrich Stoevesandt. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993, 396–402, here 396.

⁵⁷ Ragaz is even more enthusiastic in his estimation of the social democrats when he writes that the "movement reveals itself as the true way to God for our generation." Leonhard Ragaz, *Das Evangelium und der soziale Kampf der Gegenwart*. Basel: C. F. Lendorff, 1907, 40.

⁵⁸ Günther Dehn, *Die alte Zeit, die vorigen Jahre*. München: Kaiser, 1964, 150.

Dehn says that his sermons “received a quiet religious socialist colouring”,⁵⁹ and would say things like: “Is God only the God of the pious people? Is he not also the God of the social democrat? Yes, of course, also the God of the social democrat.”⁶⁰ Clearly, even if Tillich had read nothing of Kutter and Ragaz, the tropes and positions of Swiss religious socialism were represented sympathetically among some of his contemporaries.

Therefore, taking stock of all we have covered in this section – from Wichern to the founding of the ESK and the FKSK – it has become clear that there were a range of responses from within the Protestant church which defy the simple binaries of conservative/liberal theology or conservative/socialist politics. The church was afraid of social democracy, for the sake of the nation, for love of Kaiser, and because it felt threatened as an institution. However, thoughtful Christians, both theologically “positive” and “liberal”, were able to differentiate between what they saw as the strengths and weaknesses of social democracy and learned to campaign on behalf of workers using the resources of their traditions.⁶¹ Many remained highly suspicious of social democracy while some sought to build bridges and in exceptional cases these bridges were crossed.

In the light of the wealth of evidence to the contrary, Tillich’s 1936 claim that most intellectuals were politically indifferent before the war is demonstrably untenable. Intellectuals, especially in the church, were intensely debating the significance of and the appropriate response to the rise of the SPD.

4 Tillich’s teachers

Against the backdrop of the church’s responses to social democracy, we will now consider what Tillich’s university teachers thought and taught about the social question. The three most influential university teachers in Tillich’s student days in Halle were his fellow Wingolf members Martin Kähler (1835–1912) and Wilhelm Lütgert (1867–1938), and philosopher Fritz Medicus (1876–1956).

⁵⁹ Dehn, *Die alte Zeit, die vorigen Jahre*, 159.

⁶⁰ Dehn, *Die alte Zeit, die vorigen Jahre*, 159.

⁶¹ Therefore, Mark Correll is wrong when he says “The religious establishment at the end of the nineteenth century already proved to be outdated and unwilling to face the social and cultural issues of the day.” Mark Correll, *Shepherds of the Empire. Germany’s Conservative Protestant Leadership 1888–1919*. Minneapolis, MA: Fortress Press, 2014, 10.

4.1 Martin Kähler

Tillich always claimed Kähler influenced him greatly, particularly with regard to his emphasis on the doctrine of justification by faith.⁶² Tillich visited Kähler's lectures on ethics in the summer semester of 1907.⁶³ At the founding of the FKSK, Martin Kähler lamented that the ESK was capitulating to a liberal theological position and was involved in helping his brother-in-law⁶⁴ Stoecker prepare the *kirchlich-soziales Manifest* printed in key conservative and Christian-socialist newspapers in July 1896.⁶⁵ Before his death in 1912, I have found no indication that Kähler stopped supporting Stoecker's cause; he would have been very strongly nationalist.⁶⁶ After the First World War, most of the CSP milieu sided with the nationalist, monarchist and anti-semitic *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (DNVP), for whom his son Wilhelm Kähler was a politician.⁶⁷

⁶² However, the influence was not always apparent. See Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, 53–54.

⁶³ See the archival record in Georg Neugebauer, *Tillichs frühe Christologie. Eine Untersuchung zu Offenbarung und Geschichte bei Tillich vor dem Hintergrund seiner Schellingrezeption*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007, 408.

⁶⁴ Their wives were sisters. It is said that Kähler would need to admonish Stoecker at family gatherings around the dining table to be quieter and not act like he was at a political meeting. See Walter Bußmann, "Siegfried A. Kähler: Persönlichkeit und Werk – Ein Essay." In Siegfried A. Kaehler, *Briefe 1900–1963*, ed. Walter Bussmann, Günther Grünthal. Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1993, 33–89, here 37.

⁶⁵ On Kähler's opposition, see Traugott Jähnichen, Norbert Friedrich, "Geschichte der sozialen Ideen im deutschen Protestantismus." In *Geschichte der sozialen Ideen in Deutschland. Sozialismus – Katholische Soziallehre – Protestantische Sozialethik*, ed. Helga Grebing, 2. Auflage. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005, 867–1103, here 957. On his involvement with the *Manifest*, Thomas Schlag notes "[...] daß auch Kähler an den Vorarbeiten zu diesem Manifest beteiligt war, wie vor allem Nathusius' Briefe an Stoecker vom 7.6. und 19.6.1896 deutlich machen, vgl. Nachlaß Stoecker, Rep. 92, 1." Thomas Schlag, *Martin von Nathusius und die Anfänge protestantischer Wirtschafts- und Sozialethik*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, Band 93. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1998, 313, note 36.

⁶⁶ Martin Kähler's son Siegfried wrote a critical political biography of the founding of the CSP from his childhood experiences of political discussions with his uncle Stoecker. See Siegfried A. Kähler, "Stöckers Versuch, eine christlich-soziale Arbeiterpartei in Berlin zu begründen (1878)." In *Deutscher Staat und deutsche Parteien. Beiträge zur deutschen Partei- und Ideengeschichte*, ed. Paul Wentzke. München, Berlin: Oldenbourg, 1922.

⁶⁷ Jähnichen, Friedrich, "Geschichte der sozialen Ideen im deutschen Protestantismus", 940. The claim that a theologian Martin Kähler wrote for the nationalist newspaper *Eiserne Blätter* (see Rainer Hering, "Eiserne Blätter (1914–1939)." In *Handbuch des Antisemitismus. Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Wolfgang Ben, Band 6. Berlin: De Gruyter, K. G. Saur, 2013, 170–171) is surely mistaken, since Martin Kähler died before the paper began. Perhaps his son Wilhelm is intended. His son Walter was later active in the confessing church.

Kähler did not himself publish anything directly addressing the social question. However, he addresses the theological and ethical significance of work, contrasting the biblical understanding of work as divine service ennobling humanity, with the stance of the “so-called workers” of socialist movements.⁶⁸ He plays down the difference between employees and employers, insisting that all should be workers whatever their profession.⁶⁹ Strikingly, his examples of hard workers are the industrialist Alfred Krupp and the Kaisers Friedrich II and Wilhelm I – hardly the proletariat – whose work is deemed to be a kind of “prayer” as it serves the common good.⁷⁰

In a context where rich employers and the monarchy were seen by the SPD as the chief architects and symbols of a system of alienation and exploitation, this indicates Kähler had little sympathy with the political demands of workers. Slavery and unemployment are evils, but one is left with the impression that the uppity worker would simply be admonished to have a better attitude. Recalling the range of responses to the social question we sketched in the Protestant church, in Kähler’s case the portrait emerges of a theologian who, while sensitive to the plight of the ill and destitute, was wont to take sides for the conservative political elite.

4.2 Wilhelm Lütgert

Tillich visited more lectures by Wilhelm Lütgert than any other of his teachers. One of these was on ethics in the summer semester of 1906.⁷¹ Lütgert’s position is clearly expressed in his address to an FKSK meeting in 1907 on the topic: “Was heißt christliche Arbeiterbewegung?”⁷² He explains the rise of social democracy with the church’s reluctance to engage with economic and social policy. But, on the other hand, the SPD is “a religious movement [...] an anti-church, anti-Christian movement” because of its atheistic basis. Only an alternative social Christianity, affirming social values inherent to it, will be able to overcome the challenge.⁷³

⁶⁸ Martin Kähler, “Einleitung zur Ethik. Zwei Eröffnungsreden zu Vorlesungen über die Ethik.” In *Dogmatische Zeitfragen III: Zeit und Ewigkeit*. 2. Auflage. Leipzig: A. Deichert’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1913, 99–115, here 110.

⁶⁹ Martin Kähler, “Einleitung zur Ethik”, 109.

⁷⁰ Martin Kähler, “Einleitung zur Ethik”, 112 f.

⁷¹ See the archival record in Neugebauer, *Tillichs frühe Christologie*, 407.

⁷² Wilhelm Lütgert, *Was heißt christliche Arbeiterbewegung?*, Hefte der freien kirchlich-sozialen Konferenz, Band 42. Berlin, 1908.

⁷³ Lütgert, *Was heißt christliche Arbeiterbewegung?*, 23.

Lütgert's view of the SPD in 1907 echoes Stoecker's opposition: the aim of socialists is revolution, rule of the workers over the bourgeois, the neutralization of class differences, and the public ownership of all means of production.⁷⁴ Lütgert contrasts this with a reading of 1 Cor 12 as a picture of the state's population which has different members with different gifts, and where the government is the head.⁷⁵ This counts against the principle of equality, says Lütgert, for people are not all the same. Even in heaven there will be no equality, and "whoever cannot bear this, is no Christian, but is envious"⁷⁶.

Rather like Kähler, who appeals to the ideal of hard-working industrialists and Kaisers, Lütgert thinks an entrepreneur needs as much money as possible just as a professor needs as much learning as possible. Money is a means of working, a tool.⁷⁷ The solution to the social division in society is a changed attitude within each profession where each group is concerned for the good of the other groups. Social reform is important, but the revolutionary tendencies of the workers will not be eradicated by mere charity on behalf of the church or the state.

Thus electoral reform enabling better representation of lower classes needs to proceed, as well as the economic battle for tariff contracts. However, one should be cautious since one can only have freedom *within* one's class group,⁷⁸ and the economic battle is only justified if done in a Christian way. He has a vision of a benevolent entrepreneur and good-willed worker in harmony. Education of the workers to this effect must be a priority, so the Christian workers' movement – organisations parallel and alternative to the SPD unions – should be encouraged and grow.

4.3 Fritz Medicus

Fritz Medicus was Tillich's young philosophy lecturer in Halle.⁷⁹ Tillich was increasingly drawn to Medicus over the course of his studies, and under his wings learned much about Fichte and Schelling, which spurred him on to offer

⁷⁴ Lütgert, *Was heißt christliche Arbeiterbewegung?*, 32.

⁷⁵ Lütgert, *Was heißt christliche Arbeiterbewegung?*, 26 and 33.

⁷⁶ Lütgert, *Was heißt christliche Arbeiterbewegung?*, 27.

⁷⁷ Lütgert, *Was heißt christliche Arbeiterbewegung?*, 28.

⁷⁸ Lütgert, *Was heißt christliche Arbeiterbewegung?*, 30.

⁷⁹ For an overview of their relationship, see Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, Alf Christophersen, "Neukanianismus, Fichte- und Schellingrenaissance. Paul Tillich und sein philosophischer Lehrer Fritz Medicus." *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologieggeschichte / Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 11 (2004): 52–78.

critiques of Kähler's disregard of metaphysics.⁸⁰ We find some possible evidence of Medicus' political leanings in the lecture series on Fichte which Tillich would have heard as a student.⁸¹ Here Medicus describes how the early Fichte despised the censorship under the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm II and enthused about the French Revolution. In biographical and bibliographical sketches, Medicus describes Fichte as a democrat, a strong supporter of progressive politics which, understanding the state in terms of a contract, serves the goal of working towards a culture of ethical freedom. Such democratic politics is not afraid to modify any constitution or societal order:

"Do the people have a right to remove the privileges of the nobility? Of course the democrat affirms the question: the privileges are seen as based on contracts, and no contract is indissoluble. The question of the right to collection of church assets is answered in an analogue way."⁸²

Though Medicus does not make the connection explicit, we should note that Fichte's answers to the questions of 1793 (when Fichte is writing) line up with social democratic views about the privileges of the nobility and the church in 1905 (when Medicus is writing). It seems unlikely that Medicus' students would have missed the parallels.

Medicus also comments on *Der geschlossene Handelsstaat* (1800),⁸³ where Fichte sketches the ideal political state.⁸⁴ Fichte's position entails that great inequalities should not be present and that any differences should be differences based on the work of the individual, and not, to put it now in Marxist terms, on the alienation of labour from the worker. To enable such a situation the state must have "oversight of all the production of goods".⁸⁵ It is perhaps therefore

80 See Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, 49–51.

81 Fritz Medicus, *J. G. Fichte. Dreizehn Vorlesungen gehalten an der Universität Halle*. Berlin: Verlag von Reuther & Reichard, 1905.

82 Medicus, *J. G. Fichte*, 54.

83 J. G. Fichte, "Der geschlossene Handelsstaat." In *Fichte Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Fritz Medicus, Band 3. Leipzig, 1911, 387–513.

84 Fichte's view of property is that the state protects a right to certain actions concerning objects rather than the right to certain objects: to say "that is my tree" is for Fichte merely to assert the right to pick its fruits or fell the tree but not strictly speaking that the tree belongs to me, because my so-called property is only mine as a gift of the state which upholds the contract of all with all. See Medicus, *J. G. Fichte*, 167.

85 "The task of the state is to carry out the sharing (of rights to actions concerning objects), such that everyone receives that which is theirs. Everyone wants to live. The sharing of property should proceed such that everyone can live from that which has become theirs, and if one lives a little more comfortably than another, then this should – in the reason-state – only be the fault of that person". Medicus, *J. G. Fichte*, 168.

not surprising that early German socialist Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864) drew on this writing from Fichte to find inspiration for improving the situation of workers.⁸⁶

In these instances, we might on the one hand think that Medicus is merely giving an account of Fichte's thought. I have not found evidence of social democratic sympathies in Medicus' writings.⁸⁷ But on the other hand, if the political context of academia in Prussia did not look kindly on socialist thought, one might expect a political conservative to offer a barbed comment about Fichte's folly or philosophical sins of youth. As it stands, in a lecture series which goes out of its way to defend Fichte against critics, and waxes rather glowingly about Fichte's character, Fichte's political stance goes uncommented. It is tempting, and perhaps rather too convenient for our consideration of Tillich's political development, to imagine Tillich in Halle receiving an education from a Medicus sympathetic to the social democratic cause. This is entirely possible, but the evidence is inconclusive.⁸⁸ The most we can say with confidence is that rudimentary questions of political theory would probably have been mediated to Tillich and his contemporaries through Medicus' reading of Fichte and other German idealists.

5 Johannes Tillich

Paul Tillich's father has until recently only been known to Tillich scholarship through the lens of the Tillich's various autobiographical statements which emphasise his father's great moral and political authority over the young Tillich. In 1936, Tillich wrote:

"Most difficult to overcome was the impact of the authoritarian system on my personal life, especially on its religious and intellectual side. [...]. My father was a conscientious,

86 See Jürgen Boeck, Ernst-Ulrich Huster, Benjamin Benz, *Sozialpolitik in Deutschland. Eine systematische Einführung*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004, 54.

87 Medicus moved to a professorship in Zürich in 1911, which would have made expressing any social democratic position easier than in Prussia. But Medicus' only obvious political writing in this period is during the First World War, where he offers a defence of the German fight on the foundations of Luther and German idealist philosophy. See Fritz Medicus, *Die Kulturbedeutung des deutschen Volkes, Vortrag gehalten vor der Züricher Freistudentenschaft*. Zürich: Art. Institut Orell Füssli, 1915. He would however renounce his German citizenship in 1935 in response to the rise of the Nazis. See Graf, Christophersen, "Neukantianismus, Fichte- und Schellingrenaissance", 67.

88 A further speculation is that Medicus, taught and influenced by Ferdinand Tönnies (see footnote 19), was won over by his own teacher's social democratic sympathies.

very dignified, completely convinced and, in the presence of doubt, angry supporter of the conservative Lutheran point of view.”⁸⁹

Geheime Konsistorialrat Dr. h.c. Johannes Tillich (1857–1937) was indeed a well-known theological conservative pastor and church politician in Berlin.⁹⁰ He was not only theologically conservative, but also a convinced political conservative. One of the earliest published writings (available in the *Paul Tillich Archiv Marburg*, hereafter *PTAM*) of Johannes Tillich is the printed transcript of his 1888 speech *Christentum und Parteiwesen*, held at a local branch meeting of the German Conservative Party (DKP).⁹¹ Although speaking to party members, Johannes offers an altogether less party-political account, outlining the general importance, even duty, of Christians being engaged politically.⁹²

Most pertinently for our consideration of Paul Tillich’s political education at home, Johannes emphasises that Christians should come to a reasoned conviction about the best party, not out of mere family tradition, or for personal gain. They should be able to have the courage to express political conviction and defend the choice of this or the other party. Refusing to characterise his own conservative political party as the necessarily Christian option, he offers an irenic account of the shared concerns of the Liberal, Progressive and Conservative parties, which each emphasise vital aspects of good governance to differing degrees.⁹³

However, the perception of a political threat to the work of the church, and thus also to the nation, flares up in several passages of the speech. Some revolutionary parties are “more dangerous than two enemy armies” for the fatherland, they are fundamentally un-Christian since they dare to rebel against the God-given authority. While the tepid and tardy majority of citizens sleep, there is a duty to decidedly oppose such groups, who are driven by the spirit of revolution. Such a spirit is bad, “whether it works with firebrand and barricade, or whether for now, in social-democratic style, it ignites and fans the flame of discontentment”. The press of such a party “estranges the hearts of the people

⁸⁹ Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections”, 8. See also Idem, “On the Boundary” [1936], 4.

⁹⁰ For more on Tillich’s father, especially his opposition to liberal theology, see Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, 39–41; and Samuel Searn, “Christentum als Gewissenssache. Johannes Tillichs positive Theologie.” In *Der junge Paul Tillich und die Theologie um 1900. Theologie – Wissenschaft – Religion*, ed. Christian Danz. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024, 23–59.

⁹¹ Johannes Tillich, *Christentum und Parteiwesen* (1888), *PTAM*, Box 63B.

⁹² Johannes vision is not that one brings questions of faith and doctrine into politics, but that one’s faith should inform the thought, actions, and goals of the Christian in politics.

⁹³ He envisages a broad alliance of men from all parties who try to solve political problems from a Christian perspective and oppose attempts to restrict the work of the church in the nation.

from their king”, and so the Conservative party, a party with “sincere warmth, with gladly sacrificial love” for the king and his house, with “*German ethos*, [...] always striving to keep that which is of foreign character out of the life of the state and the people[...] a party of order [...]” need to step up to defend Germany against its inner enemies.⁹⁴

In view of the internationality of the kingdom of God, a Christian should be free of “national vanity”. But “the Christian loves his fatherland, his people, his ruler, loves them so warmly, so glowingly, that, with God, he gladly surrenders his possessions and blood for King and fatherland.” Now facing a revolutionary threat, the Christian is called to take up an ideal fight against the selfish, unbelieving, materialist apotheosis of self and nature: social democracy.

The witness of Johannes Tillich from the archives corroborates Paul Tillich’s memories of a Prussian childhood enamoured with the glory, pomp and chivalry of the monarchy and its armies, and of the strongest opposition to socialist politics:

“The existence of a parliament, democratic forces, socialist movements, and of a strong criticism of the emperor and the army did not affect the conservative Lutheran groups of the East among whom I lived. All these democratic elements were rejected, distortedly represented, and characterized as revolutionary, which meant criminal.”⁹⁵

Tillich clearly did not grow up in a politically apathetic household. His father held and articulated clear political views and was very much aware of the social question. But he thought that here “the willingness to sacrificially help the oppressed classes in the spirit of practical Christianity” was an appropriate response. Johannes was very concerned for the furtherance of the evangelistic or catechetical efforts of the Inner Mission and its practical care for the poor and sick.

Johannes saw motivation for such practical Christianity as on the one hand, simple love of neighbour.⁹⁶ However, on the other hand, the work of institutions for the furtherance of care is equally seen in its devotional and instrumental

⁹⁴ Johannes does not argue that a monarchy is the most Christian form for the state. It is the Conservative party’s conviction that it is the best form, but this conviction stands to debate, it should not be held like a dogma. Nevertheless, since the monarchy is established in Germany, he argues, the Christian should see the right of the crown as inviolable, and – “full of piety” – see every civil servant adorned with authority of the crown.

⁹⁵ Tillich, “Autobiographical Reflections”, 7.

⁹⁶ Lack of concern for the poor is “in many cases a pharisaic, selfish attitude, narrow-hearted lack of participation in the larger church as a whole [...] lack of Christian love.” Johannes Tillich, *Bericht über die kirchlich-sittlichen Zustände in der Diözese*. 3. Mai 1899. Diesdorf bei Gäbersdorf: Buchdruckerei der Schreiberhau-Diesdorfer Rettungsanstalten, 1899, *PTAM*, Box 63B.

aspects, that is, as an expression of piety and means of evangelism.⁹⁷ The evangelistic aspect was of course always also an attempt to rescue the proletariat from the clutches of the social democratic party.

The evangelistic aspect of Wichern's ministry is emphasised by Johannes in April 1908.⁹⁸ He welcomes the celebration of Wichern's 100th birthday in the church and in schools. He highlights the fact that Wichern's contribution was inspired by positive Christianity as he tried to "have Christian influence on the masses". Solving the social question from a Christian standpoint requires careful discernment of the different tasks of church and state. The FKSK, says Johannes, offers a fine opportunity to do just that. He has high expectations of the upcoming speech by his friend Lütgert (the one discussed in the section above), but has a problem with the suggestion of the FKSK committee that there should be a Christian servants' movement because "it intervenes [...] in home life, especially in the order of the Christian family". Such an intervention would damage the relationship between masters and servants. Instead, housewives should be encouraged to treat servants well. The idea that servants should negotiate tariff contracts and be elected to servants' committees is problematic.⁹⁹ It should be noted that this suggestion was close to home since the Tillich family enjoyed the help of a *Waschfrau*, and, following the death of Johannes' wife in 1903, a full-time servant, Anna Harz, joined the family.¹⁰⁰

In a newspaper article of July 1908, Johannes includes a report on that same FKSK in Bielefeld where Lütgert spoke. He approves of what he perceives as Lütgert's call to not sublate social differences and acknowledge that the worker's legitimate striving for wealth must be limited by the social position of the worker

97 Johannes writes in 1896 that the love for the poor is a substitute for the love of the Lord before his return, a priestly service to the Lord, and is also a prophetic witness of God's grace in the life of the carer – diaconic effort is an effective strategy for fighting the "spite and hate of an unbelieving epoch". Christian love wins over "that embittered person, who has broken with throne and altar". Johannes Tillich, "Predigt über Joh. 12,1–8 zum 4. Jahresfest der Lutherstiftung." In *Maria und Martha. Grüße aus dem Diakonissen-Mutterhaus Lutherstiftung zu Frankfurt a. O.*, (Nr. 14., January 1896), *PTAM*, Box 63B.

98 Johannes Tillich appears to have regularly contributed a church-political review for the conservative, staunchly monarchist *Neue Preußische Zeitung* (hereafter: NPZ). See Dagmar Bussiek, "Mit Gott für König und Vaterland!" *Die Neue Preußische Zeitung (Kreuzzeitung) 1848–1892*. Münster: Lit Verlag, 2002. In the *Nachlass* of Johannes Tillich, alongside the various printed sermons bearing his name are a collection of cuttings of NPZ newspaper articles (see *PTAM* Box 63B). Although the author of the articles is never printed in the newspaper, there seems no good reason to doubt his authorship.

99 N. N. "Kirchliche Vierteljahresrundschaу II." *NPZ* 1908: 178 (Evening edition, 14th April 1908); *PTAM* Box 63B.

100 Johannes Tillich, *Aus meinem Leben* (transcript in *PTAM* Box 63A), 3.

– that is: social mobility is not a desideratum. He finds Lütgert’s call for the independent political engagement of workers questionable, worrying whether an association of workers could possibly conform to a “healthy social structuring”, and whether talk of an economic fight is worthy of Christianity. If it is justified, then the same right should be granted to those employers to fight for their position.¹⁰¹

We notice here a similar tendency as we saw in Kähler and Lütgert to take the side of the elite employers and hang on to the social structure of society. We see also a cautious awareness of and support for the activities of the FKSK. But the tenor of fear and suspicion toward the SPD seems to be a constant for Johannes.

6 Tillich’s student days

Having painted this great backdrop of context, I want to survey Tillich’s earliest statements about his political position from his student days. It has become clear that in the light of his father and his teachers specifically, and the concerns of the Prussian church in general, that almost no intellectuals in Tillich’s context could have been considered politically indifferent. Among the student body this was no different. A contemporary of Tillich from his student days, Eduard Juhl, remembers the Wingolf fraternity in Halle as follows:

“How often after our social meeting or Convent did we go for a ‘night-walk around the Pauluskirche,’ and we discussed then until way past midnight about heaven and hell, God and the devil, about *the order of society, about social, political, racial problems* [...]”¹⁰²

Tillich would have been well informed and articulate about political issues as he discussed and debated politics with his student friends and listened to his teachers give their opinions. The claim of Paucks about earlier political naivety is patently wrong in this respect. Furthermore, in the period we are concerned with in this section, up to February 1909,¹⁰³ there is some very limited but nonetheless

¹⁰¹ N. N. “Kirchliche Vierteljahresrundschaу.” *NPZ* 1908: 319 (Morning edition, 10th July 1908); *PTAM* Box 63B.

¹⁰² Paul Tillich, *Ein Lebensbild in Dokumenten. Briefe, Tagebuch-Auszüge, Berichte*, ed. Renate Albrecht, Margot Hahl, Paul Tillich, *Gesammelte Werke, Ergänzungs- und Nachlaßbände*, Band 5. Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1980, 33, emphasis mine. The German at the end of this quote is: “[...] über Gesellschaftsordnung, über soziale, politische, völkische Probleme [...].”

¹⁰³ In February 1909 Tillich finished his *Erste Theologische Examen*, the German theology ‘finals’ at the end of their time at university, and so marks the end of what we could call his time as an

striking evidence from Tillich's little-known 'undergraduate' writings that Tillich was even somewhat affirmative of social democracy, in considerable contrast to his teachers and father.

In Tillich's very few writings as a student there is at first glance nothing obviously attending to the social question. However, in two places we are given an important glimpse into his position. The first is in a surviving draft of his examination sermon (*Examenspredigt*) from 1908, where, in the context of pleading for a Christian openness to science and the questions of the culture, he says that Christians are to blame for the idol of social progress because they did not listen properly to the social question.¹⁰⁴ This statement is entirely in line with voices in the FKSK (or ESK). In calling social progress an *idol*, Christian opposition to anti-religious social democracy is assumed. In pleading for openness to science and culture he is merely distancing himself from the most conservative voices.

The second writing is his 1908 *Monismusschrift*.¹⁰⁵ The essay is an attempt to claim that there is a form of idealistic philosophy (idealistic, teleological monism) which is entirely amenable to Christianity. The system presented, while not yet perfect, should be refined "until that philosophical worldview is attained which conforms to the person of Jesus and fully meets the standards of the Christian assurance of salvation."¹⁰⁶

In one section of the second part, he considers *Recht* (law, justice) as "divine, i. e. as one of the forms in which divine being asserts itself"¹⁰⁷ and makes comments on how one should therefore theologically interpret the phenomenon of social democracy:

"Wherever real justice is present, God's revelation is there. The thought shows itself to be fruitful with regard to social movements like the social democratic movement. The social

undergraduate student. As is today still the case, the second round of exams took place after the curacy.

104 See Paul Tillich, *Religion, Kultur, Gesellschaft: Unveröffentlichte Texte Aus Der Deutschen Zeit (1908–1933)*, Idem, *Gesammelte Werke, Ergänzungs- und Nachlaßbände*, Band 10, Teil 1. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999, 6.

105 The *Monismusschrift* is the name usually given to the writing titled *Welche Bedeutung hat der Gegensatz von monistischer und dualistischer Weltanschauung für die christliche Religion*. It exists in two forms – a handwritten draft (*Urfassung*, Tillich, *Frühe Werke*, 20–93) and a later edited and shortened edition with neatly presented handwriting, which Tillich gave to his lecturer Fritz Medicus and friend Hermann Schafft, both of whom added comments to the manuscript (*Schönschrift*, Paul Tillich, *Frühe Werke*, ed. Gert Hummel, Doris Lax, Idem, *Gesammelte Werke, Ergänzungs- und Nachlaßbände*, Band 9. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998, 94–153). I refer to the latter version.

106 Tillich, *Monismusschrift*, 153. For more on the content and structure of the *Monismusschrift*, see Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, 49–50.

107 Tillich, *Monismusschrift*, 122.

ideal of social democracy has become for many virtually a religious ideal, able to awaken enthusiasm for battle without the hope of immortality as goal of a perhaps still far-off future. This would be impossible unless here there were not really a religious good [*religiöses Gut*] behind it. It would be good, if in Christian circles it would be more impressively proclaimed that social concern is a divine concern, that wherever justice does not break through, an act of divine revelation is hindered.”¹⁰⁸

Tillich here goes beyond the standard conservative suggestion that Christians should be more practical and help the poor so that the workers do not turn to social democracy. Rather, he sees a divine concern for justice behind the social democratic call for justice. He writes of God *revealing* himself whenever true *Recht* (law or justice) is present, applying this to social democracy. Rather than damning the movement as lawless or criminal, as conservatives were wont to do, he insists that the fervour for socialist ideals is due to the religious *Gut* (good or asset) from which it is fed. Rather than seeing social democracy as fanaticism, or entirely opposed to Christianity, Christians should recognise the religious good and affirm the social concern as God’s own concern. Expressed negatively, opposition to divine concern, opposition to justice, is to stand in the way of God’s self-revelation.¹⁰⁹ Recalling the various positions of his teachers, and the various approaches to social democracy in Germany as a whole, this does sound very much like one of the Swiss religious socialist voices.

In 1888 Tillich’s father attempted to see Christian concerns in many parties. But the one party which his father considered deadly and dangerous is now Tillich’s political neighbour in whom he sees God’s concern for justice. Although since the Socialist Laws of the 1880s much had changed, in 1908 social democratic allegiance still had professional implications, as in the case of Leo Arons above. A young student offering such a sympathetic assessment of social democracy risked getting himself a dubious reputation. This is understood precisely as such by his friend Hermann Schafft, who comments in the manuscript margins: “Party-school graduation certificate!”¹¹⁰

Neither Tillich nor Schafft’s comment means that Tillich would have voted for the SPD or was expressing party allegiance among his peers in 1908. I think Schafft’s comment makes sense as a witty reaction. Schafft sees such a

108 German: “Überall, wo wirkliches Recht vorhanden ist, ist göttliche Offenbarung. [...] überall, wo das Recht nicht zum Durchbruch kommt, ein Akt göttlicher Offenbarung verhindert wird.” Tillich, *Monismusschrift*, 122.

109 We can see something here of his theology of culture in *nuce*: he interprets culture with theological categories. The interpretation of political culture in 1908 leads him to see social democracy as something which challenges the church prophetically.

110 The German editor notes: “Am Rand von Schafft: ‘Reifezeugnis für die Parteischule!’”, Tillich, *Monismusschrift*, 122, note 36.

sympathetic theological evaluation of the party in Tillich's essay that it *sounds like* Tillich is a religious socialist who has dared to become a social democrat. Tillich appears to be quite seriously expressing a religious socialist trope. Tillich's notion that divine justice is manifest in the social democratic movement is the sort of thing one would expect from the Swiss religious socialist Kutter, who could say such things although he never became a social democrat himself.

7 Sermons and writings after graduation

During Tillich's time as a pastor and scholar March 1909 – September 1914, Tillich had several lengthy spells involving him preaching. His sermons from this period have until recently only received scant attention.¹¹¹ When we analyse the sermons and other writings with the German political background in mind, we discover further clues about Tillich's political stance.

His first period of preaching was in Berlin Lichtenrade, then a village parish. He was an auxiliary preacher covering the secondment of pastor Ernst Klein to the Deutsche Orient-Mission. Klein, an old friend of Tillich's father, was a theological conservative with a strong evangelistic and social conscience.¹¹² He had previously been removed from his parish in Silesia because of his political activities on behalf of the poor and underpaid weavers.¹¹³

In Lichtenrade, Tillich preached for just three months, from March to June 1909. His attention was focussed on issues of personal piety.¹¹⁴ Tillich's only utterances which could be considered political are entirely quietist: Jesus is the man who does not want to change the world but endures.¹¹⁵ Politics without God spoils what it wants to improve.¹¹⁶ The world of politics, including those who oppose the church, is simply entrusted to God's providence.¹¹⁷

He continued to live in Lichtenrade and work on Schelling until October 1910. It was in this period that he struck up a close and enduring friendship

¹¹¹ Paul Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, ed. Erdmann Sturm, Idem, *Frühe Predigten*, ed. Erdmann Sturm, Idem, *Gesammelte Werke, Ergänzungs- und Nachlaßbände*, Band 7. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994. My recent book, Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, attends to the early sermons in several chapters.

¹¹² Julius H. Rubin, *The Other Side of Joy: Religious Melancholy Among the Bruderhof*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 27.

¹¹³ Markus Baum, *Against the Wind: Eberhard Arnold and the Bruderhof*. Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 1998, 6.

¹¹⁴ See Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, 57–75.

¹¹⁵ See No. 5, Lichtenrade, Lätarewoche 1909, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 44.

¹¹⁶ See No. 10, Lichtenrade, 18. April 1909, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 66.

¹¹⁷ See No. 4, Lichtenrade, Lätarewoche 1909, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 39.

with local pastor Richard Wegener, former curate at Lichtenrade, who was later a religious socialist with Tillich, after the war. Moving back to Berlin to his father, he then continued his academic work (two dissertations on Schelling) until the beginning of his curacy in Nauen. His apparently religious-socialist statement in the 1908 *Monismusschrift*, appears at first to have been a singular event with no consequence whatsoever for his following work.

7.1 Nauen 1911–12

In Nauen, Tillich spent a year fulfilling the conditions of his curacy, and his sermons are not generally political. However, unlike the pietistic sermons in Lichtenrade, his sermons in Nauen are marked significantly by a theology of culture. And when he attempts to describe or interpret his culture, his approach to politics becomes visible.

Two sermons stand out in this regard. The first is from September/October 1911, a sermon on Psalm 73. Tillich shows here great sympathy for the plight of the working classes under the conditions of industrialisation:

“As we heard the words of our Psalm, did it not sound like the voice of one of the millions in our people who have lost their faith because they cannot imagine how God could put up with millions and millions groaning under the load of sour work and external need, while several hundred collect riches beyond imagination?”¹¹⁸

The Psalm, Tillich continues, is an expression of the enormous violence of hate which fills the Psalmist on account of the happiness of the rich and the misery of the poor. The Psalm makes the hate-filled speeches of the leaders of the people – Tillich means the social democratic leaders – seem weak and powerless in comparison. The Psalmist knew the plight of the workers:

“Truly this man knew what it means to live in musty cellars where no sunlight reaches or cooped up in high roof chambers which offer hardly any protection against the heat of the summer and the cold of the winter, and then to walk through the streets of the rich and see their palaces. He knew what it means to worry daily about one’s daily bread and see the tables of the rich bend (under the weight) of delicacies from all over the world. He knows what it means to earn every piece of clothing with hard work and (then) go through the streets where the shop-windows glisten with silk and gold. He knows what it means to be dependent and tremble before the caprice of a ruthless master. He knows what it means to be despised and trampled upon, robbed of rights and honour. He knows it all and expresses it in words which makes us shudder in our innermost being. [...] Is it not as if the pious have been

118 No. 36, Nauen, September/October 1911, Psalm 73, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 180.

chosen for the sufferings of poverty and misery of servitude? And is it not as if the godless were the privileged in the world, to whose feet all the goods of the world lie?"

Here the knowledge of the Psalmist is not only knowledge of the misery of the poor, but knowledge of the relative wealth of the rich godless elite. The misery of the poor is not only destitution, but also dependency, fear, lack of respect, lack of rights. Tillich reads the Psalm as an ancient drama wholly relevant to the present injustices experienced by the working class in his time. The typical trope of conservatives that social democratic leaders sow hate and division is turned on its head. For here the hate is justified: it is the Psalmist of Holy Scripture who is filled with a holy hate in the face of injustice.

Tillich frames this sympathetic portrayal in a characterisation of the present generation as an age of doubt, just as the pious Psalmist is led through doubt by God's pedagogy to say "nevertheless God is Israel's hope". The "nevertheless" of the Psalmist is however not religious distraction, it is not one which closes its eyes the miserable plight of the poor.¹¹⁹

Yet, here criticising social democrats, Tillich criticises belief in human utopias ("belief in the perfection of anything human") as a kind of false "nevertheless" of despair and rebellion.¹²⁰

Another Nauen sermon of relevance is from January 1912, just after the results of the *Reichstagswahl* where the SPD became the party with the most seats. In Berlin, the result was not surprising; in 1903 and 1907, five of the six seats had also gone to the SPD, and one to the left-liberal FVP. But for Germany as a whole, the development of the SPD from fourth largest party in 1907 to first in 1912, meant it was perhaps inevitable that Tillich would comment on what was a national political upheaval.

Tillich assumes those listening to his sermon share at least reserve toward and perhaps vehement opposition to social democratic leaders. He describes the build-up to the election as having filled Germany with "the battle cries of hate and bitterness, of fanaticism and deception, of pride and rhetoric".¹²¹ The successful voices – the social democrats – were those "against all order and authority, against everything established and all dependency in state and church".¹²²

The question now is how to respond to the election results as *Protestant* Christians. For, soberingly for Protestants, the Roman Catholic *Zentrumspartei*

¹¹⁹ No. 36, Nauen, September/October 1911, Psalm 73, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 183.

¹²⁰ No. 36, Nauen, September/October 1911, Psalm 73, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 183.

¹²¹ No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 214.

¹²² No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 214.

turned out to be “the strongest bulwark against the floods of subversion (*Umsturz*) which break forth from the bosom of the Protestant church”.¹²³ Tillich’s imagery characterises social democracy as a child of Protestantism. For Protestantism had offered the “freedom of spirit and conscience, of faith and of action”,¹²⁴ from which social democracy could even develop.

The suggestion that social democracy is a development within Protestant Christendom (its child) is now illustrated by a related but distinct analogy: the image of a man’s [sic!] development in three stages: childhood, youth and manhood. These stages correspond to the (rather Hegelian-sounding) world-historical “law of the Spirit”, which entails

“[...] first to be bound, dependent and unconscious [...] [t]hen to rip oneself free from all chains and say no to everything which he has received from others [...] finally the freedom – conscious and of one’s own accord – to return to the ground from which he grew [...]”¹²⁵

Interestingly, the three stages correspond both to personal religious-psychological development and the development of church history as a whole. Childhood is thus on the one hand one’s actual childhood marked by a terrified conscience. On the other hand, Roman Catholicism is by analogy “the church in the childhood of faith [...] that is child’s faith in all its power and all its weakness”¹²⁶.

Adolescence stands in contrast to childhood – blind faith – as a time of fighting and seeking faith, on its way to manhood: a seeing faith. Tillich alludes to Oliver Cromwell, who oversaw the execution of his monarch, as prime example of youthful protest in church history.¹²⁷ Such protest is necessary on account of the weakness of Catholicism, its blind acceptance of authority: “to protest means to say No, and Protestantism is the church which says No to Catholicism [...] it is the church of freedom.”¹²⁸

In light of this characterisation, Tillich now considers the political situation in Germany where “a third of all German men stream to the flag upon which No is written”.¹²⁹ He calls the congregation to respond as equals: “They are our brothers, co-Christians (*Mitchristen*), even if they do not want to be such,

123 No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 214 f.

124 No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 214 f.

125 No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 215.

126 No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 217.

127 No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 219.

128 No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 218.

129 No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 219.

co-Protestants (*Mitprotestanten*) who have found themselves in the desert and are thirsting.”¹³⁰

In accord with a general tendency in his Nauen sermons to level the difference between his congregants and the unbelieving ‘world’,¹³¹ Tillich offers a striking affirmation of a key aspect of social democracy – its protest against unchecked authority.

We saw in 1908 his affirmation of the social democratic call for justice as having roots in divine justice. Now in 1912 he is talking about the SPD as *Mitprotestanten* and *Mitchristen*. However, the affirmation comes from a position of critical distance. Those swept up in the enthusiasm for social democratic politics are still erring, and many are misled. Where freedom becomes a demonic net in which to catch the millions, battle, i. e. criticism, is appropriate. However, in contrast to conservative voices, “[n]ot election campaigns and patriotic speeches, not the woes of hunger and war will change our people”.¹³² Christians should above all respond with love and “a living strong manly Christianity, which in word and deed gives witness to the life within it”.¹³³ It is this “manly” witness which will call the youthful protestors to enter “manhood” and return to the church. His characterisation of the social democrats as *Mitprotestanten* sounds like Tillich has been influenced by religious socialism. But his expression solution still sounds like a pamphlet of the Inner Mission.

7.2 Moabit 1912–13

Following the year’s curacy in Nauen, Tillich spent six weeks in Berlin-Treptow, a parish with a large population of factory workers, was ordained August 1912, and then began what would be nine months in another industrial parish, Berlin-Moabit. In both parishes, Tillich was involved in what one would today call church-plants in new church buildings built to respond to the growing population.¹³⁴ Tillich would later see his time in Moabit as having helped him to deepen his understanding of the plight of the working class, and said he embraced these placements as an opportunity to get to know “real life”.¹³⁵

However, despite Tillich’s exposure to the working class through baptisms, funerals and concomitant visitations, his congregation, judging by the assumed

¹³⁰ No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 219.

¹³¹ On this tendency, see Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, 115–117.

¹³² No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 220.

¹³³ No. 42, Nauen, Januar 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 220.

¹³⁴ See Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, 126 f.

¹³⁵ Tillich, *Ein Lebensbild in Dokumenten*, 59–61.

stance of his congregants in his sermons, was largely bourgeois. Furthermore, rather than attempting to speak with workers and win them back from social democracy to the church, he spent considerable time attempting to win back intellectuals.

Tillich's apologetic evenings from his time in Moabit were not events for Moabit, but organised with a couple of his friends and colleagues from other parishes, taking place in the houses of various intellectuals in well-to-do areas. Taking a step back from the detail of his concerns in Moabit, we can discern here one sense in which Tillich's statement about his own political indifference makes sense. For what was Tillich's response to the *Reichtagswahl* in 1912, other than his comments in the sermon of January 1912? It was not political activism, it was not the attempt to found Christian worker's movements or live alongside and get to know the workers, as in Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze's *Soziale Arbeitsgemeinschaft Berlin-Ost*.¹³⁶ It was a turn to the intellectuals, indeed a flight away from the "real life" of Moabit. Yet as an apologetic initiative, it was his response to that of which the election results were a symptom: the reality that the church was losing members in modern Berlin.

As in Nauen, his weekly sermons in Moabit continued to exhibit sympathy for the poverty and misery of the "masses" as he was wont to call the working class. His generation's social conscience has awakened, Tillich says. The suffering of one class must lead to the compassion of the other, and one can no longer "live thoughtlessly in riches and pleasure while millions sigh about the burden and misery of life".¹³⁷ Furthermore, there is a characterisation of the age as being in slavery to Mammon and "the Machine",¹³⁸ motifs which were present in the Swiss religious socialists, but not exclusive to them.

Regarding contemporary politics, Tillich expresses his distaste for "the embers of hate and passion, of defamation and wickedness" he perceives.¹³⁹ Here he does not attach blame in any one direction but sees a general malaise when "every party paints a distorted picture of the other to bind its members."¹⁴⁰ By attaching blame to all parties, Tillich attempts to remain apolitical and presents a mediating position.

¹³⁶ The *Soziale Arbeitsgemeinschaft Berlin-Ost* facilitated the work of bourgeois missionaries, including many student interns, to go and live in very rudimentary conditions among workers. See Jens Wietschorke. *Arbeiterfreunde. Soziale Mission im dunklen Berlin 1911–1933*. Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus Verlag, 2013.

¹³⁷ No. 57, Moabit, 19th January 1913, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 304.

¹³⁸ No. 45, Treptow Juli 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 234 f.

¹³⁹ No. 45, Treptow Juli 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 236.

¹⁴⁰ No. 46, Moabit September 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 244.

A clear criticism of social democrats is visible in his Autumn 1912 sermon where he picks up on contemporary phrases of those demanding “my right to life”, a right which is denied by laws, ethical norms, prejudices, and class barriers.¹⁴¹ Tillich does show some sympathy for social democratic concerns expressed herein. However, he directs such modern prophets lastly to confrontation with God, before whom we have no rights but to suffer and to die, and to following Christ who gave up his right to life. Tillich’s sermon, had any social democrats heard it, would have felt like a mocking of their concerns.¹⁴² This is not what the later Tillich meant by correlation. For while setting out to answer a contemporary question, he only beats back the question to offer a foil for his Christian message.

A further sermon from the Autumn of 1912 is concerned with “the dark puzzle and the deep misery of the masses”,¹⁴³ and he chides his (rhetorically assumed bourgeois) congregants not to turn their hearts away from those who may even hate them on account of their wealth. Tillich even appears to correct eugenic voices by emphasising the humanity and burdens of the workers. Nevertheless, Tillich gives voice to concerns that the *rule* of the workers would fuel “[v]iolence, blood and injustice”.¹⁴⁴

The estrangement of the masses from the church awakens concern for their salvation, but Tillich appeals to God’s mercy to cover their collective guilt. Interestingly, Tillich shows awareness of the role of the bourgeois congregation in sustaining the miserable situation of the masses, awareness of what one would today call structural sin. However, this is no cause for activism, or the dismantling of capitalism. Instead, the universality and connectedness of guilt is for Tillich an argument against social utopia, for progress made is always also a progression in guilt.¹⁴⁵ God’s solution to the puzzle of the masses is not political but eschatological redemption, wherein a vicarious redemptive suffering of faithful bourgeois congregants for the masses even plays a role.¹⁴⁶

In one of the two extant talks for apologetic evenings held for intellectuals outside of his parish, “Das Problem der Geschichte”,¹⁴⁷ Tillich speaks about

141 See No. 47, Moabit Sept/Okt 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 247.

142 Tillich clearly expects no social democrats to be listening, if we note the assumptions made in No. 48 (Berlin-Moabit, Erlöserkirche, September/Oktober 1912), Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 253–260.

143 No. 48, Berlin-Moabit, Sept/Okt 1912, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 253. For further exposition see Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, 143 f.

144 No. 48, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 255.

145 No. 48, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 258.

146 No. 48, Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, 259 f.

147 Paul Tillich, “Das Problem der Geschichte.” In Paul Tillich, *Religion, Kultur, Gesellschaft. Unveröffentlichte Texte Aus Der Deutschen Zeit (1908–1933)*, Idem, *Gesammelte Werke, Ergänzungs-*

political traditions in a most general way. In “aristocratic conservatism”, the aristocrat “is born to rule and the crowd is in and for itself politically immature, and every attempt to change this relation is revolutionary.”¹⁴⁸ In contrast, democratic liberalism projects its values onto an ideal future and believes in the realisation of such ideas in history. Tillich prefers a dialectic view of history subsuming “the natural categories on which aristocratic conservatism props itself up, but at the same time a limiting of the democratic-liberal abstractions”¹⁴⁹. Existing traditions are, contra conservatives, not absolute. But that which is historically given should not, contra liberalism, be “devalued with the help of an abstraction of pure reason.”¹⁵⁰ Rather, that which is given should be developed according to its inner contradictions. Tillich thus implies he is a moderate with centrist politics, eschewing the extremes of the right and the left.

The 1912/13 memorandum “Kirchliche Apologetik” also belongs to Tillich’s Moabit period.¹⁵¹ It is at times like a manual for church apologists, giving many practical suggestions, including attending the events of sceptics and opponents of the church to debate with them. For the church apologist should address society’s questions, offering normative positions and answers to contemporary political issues.¹⁵² Though we have no record of such attempts during his time in Moabit, a friend recalls Tillich attending a *Kirchenaustrittsversammlung* – an event organised by social democrats to encourage people to leave the church – on 1st December 1913. There, he debated “passionately for hours against leading social democrats, among them Karl Liebknecht” (1871–1919).¹⁵³ We do not know which position Tillich took, except that he was obviously keen to stop people leaving the church.

und Nachlaßbände, Band 10, Teil 1. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999, 85–100. Though it does not appear in the programme for 1912/13, Erdmann Sturm’s editorial text suggests it is one of the apologetic evenings because of the copy of the manuscript looks like the copy of the manuscript of the last evening. There is an additional internal factor, the presence of the cordial address to a mixed public “ladies and gentlemen”.

¹⁴⁸ Tillich, “Das Problem der Geschichte”, 93.

¹⁴⁹ Tillich, “Das Problem der Geschichte”, 96.

¹⁵⁰ Tillich, “Das Problem der Geschichte”, 96.

¹⁵¹ Paul Tillich, “Kirchliche Apologetik.” In Idem, Paul Tillich, *Impressionen und Reflexionen. Ein Lebensbild in Aufsätzen, Reden und Stellungnahmen*, Idem, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 13. Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1972, 34–63. The aim of the memorandum was to convince the church consistory to create a job for Tillich and his friend Wegener to become church apologists for Berlin. A few remarks throw limited light on Tillich’s position. See Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, 130–141.

¹⁵² See Tillich, “Kirchliche Apologetik”, 53.

¹⁵³ Letter from Maria Rhine (née Klein) to Renate Albrecht, Tillich, *Impressionen und Reflexionen*, 20.

7.3 Systematic theology 1913–14

The final piece of writing from before the First World War is Tillich's 1913/14 systematic theology draft. There are three sections, Apologetics (i. e. fundamental theology or prolegomena), Dogmatics, and Ethics.¹⁵⁴ In the Apologetics we have a passage which resembles Tillich's apologetic evening from 1912/13 in one respect, that he offers a centrist position. However the centre ground taken is with respect to different poles. In the apologetic evening he had talked about the opposition of democratic liberalism and aristocratic conservatism, to talk about the role of authority and emphasize what he thought was a wise model of *gradual* political change. In his systematic theology draft, Tillich sketches the opposition of socialism and economic liberalism (i. e. capitalism) presumably in order to promote social reform (rather than system change). Economic individualism robs culture's yield for the benefit of a few individuals. Such individualism "is defeated by the storm of *socialism*,"¹⁵⁵ which however in turn destroys culture. Both extremes are wrong for Tillich.

In the Ethics of his 1913 systematic theology draft, the state is for Tillich the guarantor of freedom,¹⁵⁶ which receives its content from the church.¹⁵⁷ Tillich opposes the liberal and social democratic demand for separation of church and state.¹⁵⁸ The state's authority is not absolute; a government might so contradict the spirit of the law that the fight against the government becomes a matter of justice, the "fight for the authority of the state against caprice (*Willkür*)"¹⁵⁹.

However, Tillich is concerned less with the formal conditions of the state and more with thinking of society as social community shaped by the notion that everyone stands justified (by God). Problems occur, says Tillich when people become mere means to other's ends, mere *Arbeitskraft*. When society opposes such tendencies with the idea of humanity expressed as "social justice, mercy, personal honour of everybody, protection of women, societal ethos, personal tact,"¹⁶⁰ society is fighting for its survival.

Because each person stands as already justified, no one person can be indifferent to another, and the corollary of applying such an absolute category to

¹⁵⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* [1913]. In Tillich, *Frühe Werke*, Band IX, 278–425. In what follows I refer to the section, Apologetics (A) or Ethics (E), followed by the paragraph number and page.

¹⁵⁵ Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* [1913], A § 19, 311.

¹⁵⁶ See Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* [1913], E § 13, 403.

¹⁵⁷ See Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* [1913], E § 20, 419.

¹⁵⁸ See Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* [1913], E § 20, 419.

¹⁵⁹ See Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* [1913], E § 13, 403.

¹⁶⁰ See Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* [1913], E § 14, 405.

every individual can therefore mean transgressing societal conventions. Nevertheless, “it is never necessary to sublimate societal differences.”¹⁶¹ The highest goal of ethical love is to create a society in which the relations of all to all are absolute, that the society is transformed into the church of Jesus Christ.¹⁶² Tillich’s position here sounds both at once conservative and utopian. For on the one hand his upholding of societal differences reminds us of Lütgert essentialising them by using 1 Cor 12 to talk about society as a body with different parts. On the other hand, the transformation of society into a church of Jesus Christ is open to the religious socialist interpretation of the development of the kingdom of God in society.

The improvement of society that Tillich has in mind involves fighting against the consequences of sin and seeking justice by improving laws and social conditions. It is a programme of social reform. The theologian, says Tillich sees this humane effort as caught up in sin. As such, the very high ideals of ethical love do not mandate human-made *political* utopias. Social reform is good, but social fellowship can only be perfected through the absolute affirmation of every individual for the sake of love.¹⁶³

8 Conclusion

The rise of social democracy in Wilhelmine Germany was a major change in the political landscape. It did not occur without impassioned commentary and opposition. Tillich was therefore wrong to claim in 1936 that before the First World War most intellectuals were indifferent to politics. By focusing on the response of the church to the social question and the rise of social democracy we have seen that leading religious intellectuals were engaged in the work of the ESK from the 1890s onwards, and that this engagement was from the outset a reaction to and engagement with the rise of the SPD.

Yet Tillich is not only wrong about general indifference of the intellectuals. He is also inconsistent concerning his own indifference. For in a later part of the same autobiography, Tillich claims to have *wrestled* through to a left-wing position, against conservative opposition, by 1912. This puzzling inconsistency in Tillich’s own narrative prompted the further investigation of the present account.

Most commentators on Tillich’s life paint a pre-war portrait of a young conservative Lutheran quite at home with the *status quo* and see his development

¹⁶¹ See Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* [1913], E § 14, 406.

¹⁶² See Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* [1913], E § 14, 406.

¹⁶³ See Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* [1913], E § 21, 422

into a religious socialist as a phenomenon of his experience in the war. If this were true, Tillich, who, as I have argued elsewhere, should generally be considered a 'positive' theologian while a student,¹⁶⁴ would, alongside his father, been at home in the *Freie Kirchlich-soziale Konferenz*.

However, the 1908 *Monismusschrift* show that toward the end of his 'undergraduate' studies Tillich offered a theological critique of the conservative elite's stubborn opposition to social democracy. Employing tropes of the Swiss religious socialists, he calls out the church's blindness to what he sees as the religious, even divine concern expressed in the concern for social justice of the SPD. The conservative theological milieu of elites to which his father and theology professors belonged took the side of the conservative political elite, insisting that the SPD was anti-Christian and dangerous. If Tillich was at home in the milieu of the FKSK, he would have made them very uncomfortable. Furthermore, I submit that in the context of political restrictions in Prussian academia, Tillich's student expression of solidarity in the *Monismusschrift* was daring.

Nevertheless, it was still the expression of someone outside the social democratic movement. Evidence of Tillich's political position after graduation, during his spells as pastor, graduate student and post-doc, confirm this. It appears that already as a student, Tillich took seriously his father Johannes' demand that one should be able to defend and articulate one's political viewpoint, not merely following the herd in family traditions. We should imagine student Tillich, informed by the political philosophy of the great German idealists, vigorously debating "the order of society, [...] social, political, racial problems [...]"¹⁶⁵

Sermons and other writings from 1909–1914 show Tillich concerned to express both appreciation and criticism of the social democrats. This makes him appear to present a 'moderate' or centrist position. However, within this period there seems to be a development toward increasing criticism of social democracy.

His sermons in Lichtenrade 1909 are quietist, focusing on personal piety and leaving politics to God's providence. However in Nauen 1911–12, following his two dissertations on Schelling, Tillich offers a very different kind of approach to preaching. He portrays those large swathes of society moving away from the church sympathetically as an 'age of doubt', legitimizes the anger of the social democrats by pointing to the hate of the Psalmist in the face of injustice. After the victory of the SPD in 1912, he characterises the social democratic movement as protesting youth whose protest is as valid as that of the Protestant church against the authoritarian Roman Catholic church. They are *Mitprotestanten*; if only they could mature unto manhood and be gathered back into the church.

¹⁶⁴ See Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, Chapter 3.

¹⁶⁵ Tillich, *Ein Lebensbild in Dokumenten*, 33.

This does sound like religious socialism but is chastened by comments against utopic ideas. It is at least a generous reinterpretation of social democracy by someone who retains a distinct position.

In Moabit 1912–13, Tillich is in an entirely new setting, part of church-plants in industrial Berlin. It was allegedly his chance to get to know ‘real life’ and the working class. However, this proximity did not lead to increased sympathy for or attention to the working class. Rather, we see a flight to intellectual apologetics.

Tillich does express deep and even poetic sympathy for the masses. He does see and name inequalities, but he appears as a politically mediating pastor. Rather than speaking of the nobility of the social democratic cause as in Nauen, he sees the masses as lost in sin and dependent upon God’s mercy. The rule of the workers would fuel violence and injustice, their modern prophets who speak of rights only have the right before God to suffer and die.

Tillich’s apologetic efforts among intellectuals are not concerned with politics, we see him presenting a centrist position, belief in gradual change instead of revolution, but opposition to aristocratic conservatism. However, in his apologetic zeal to win back society to the church, he finds himself debating social democratic leaders at events designed to get people to leave the church.

His systematic theological draft from 1913 is again broadly speaking centrist, seeing the choice between unfettered capitalism and socialism as the alternative between elite robbery of culture and the destruction of culture. Thus, Tillich is in favour of gradual social reform but not social democratic futures. For in the end politics cannot change the world, only the power of (church-mediated) love.

Let us return now to the puzzling inconsistency in Tillich’s 1936 autobiography: between his claim to political indifference and to have wrestled against conservative positions to stand on the left before the war. Clearly, Tillich was not a social democrat before the war. Given his claim to have stood on the left, this probably means he supported Naumann and the liberal FVP at the *Reichtag* elections 1912.¹⁶⁶

We have seen Tillich’s wrestling against conservatism in his student days, where he makes a daring statement which sounds like a religious socialist trope. Furthermore, we see a generous affirmation of social democracy in his Nauen period when the SPD become the biggest party in the 1912 elections. Nevertheless, when confronted with the reality of life in industrial Berlin-Moabit, Tillich becomes more sceptical of social democracy, emphasising its problems and presenting himself in 1913 as a centrist in favour of social reform, avoiding the extremes of conservatism and unfettered capitalism on the one side, and revolutionary socialism on the other.

¹⁶⁶ As mentioned in footnote 7, the left could refer to social democrats or liberals.

Clearly, Tillich was not a political activist. He was no Stoecker or Naumann or Göhre moving from theology to politics. He was no practical man of the Inner Mission, no Siegmund-Schultze moving to work among the masses. Even living among the working-class in Berlin, he gravitated toward the intellectuals across the city. But Tillich was no naïve, blind or politically apathetic individual, as his revelatory narrative of the effects of the First World War would suggest. Tillich's later religious socialism was not merely a revelation of the war but was also a response to and resolution of earlier tensions in Tillich's political thinking. For Tillich, like most German intellectuals before the war, was politically aware and opinionated, interpreting and coming to terms with the central political development of his generation: the rise of social democracy.