“On Healing”: Paul Tillich’s Contribution to Current Research on Resilience

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Abstract

This article discusses how Tillich’s psychologically informed re-interpretation of dogmatic and biblical narratives may offer ways to cope with complex experiences of adversity that are characterized by a pressing need for resilience, along with extreme difficulties in communicating meaningfully. In tandem with the focus on the practical applications of Tillich’s theology, the source material comprises Tillich’s sermons (cf. *The Shaking of the Foundations* [1948]; *The New Being* [1955]; *The Eternal Now* [1963]). The analysis concentrates on three aspects of Tillich’s treatise on healing, namely (a) Tillich’s discussion of the healer’s capability to heal “in spite of”; (b) his understanding of “in spite of” and the connected semantics of fighting; (c) his (implicit) approach to re-examining the idea of healing as narratively mediated, which allows to further the discourse on resilience in regard to semantic representations and narrations.

Keywords

Tillich – resilience – in spite of – narrativity

1 Resilience in Religion and Spirituality: A Background for Re-Reading Tillich

One important practical application of analyzing the works of the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965) in relation to the subject of *resilience* is concerned with finding appropriate ways of speaking about adversarial

experiences. Tillich is usually known for his innovative ways of applying existential philosophy to Christian dogmatics while taking the psychological, sociological and artistic influences of his time into account. The proposed re-reading of Tillich's theology in relation to resilience is part of the research currently being conducted by an established inter- and transdisciplinary (e.g., theology, philosophy, medicine, psychology) research group on individual resilience.¹ In accordance with Antonovsky and concepts of salutogenesis in Health Studies, which focus on health rather than on sickness,² resilience discourses place their focus not on the state of the crisis but on overcoming it and on the resources needed for doing so.³ The unifying objective of this research program is to find methods and materials for therapeutic intervention to help people in deeply critical, existential situations; these are mainly patients in palliative care and their relatives as well as their care-givers, who may often struggle to express themselves.⁴ As outlined by Richter in this issue of the journal,⁵ one of the main focus points in resilience research aiming for therapeutic interventions is represented by the so-called *resilience factors*: these are the resources and traits that may enhance resilient behavior in a crisis – for example self-efficacy, autonomy, and emotional competence, realistic control of self and choices, realistic perception of self, action-orientated approach/viewing change as challenge or opportunity, ability to trust, coherence, and meaning-making. Considering contemporary critiques of resilience, the research group draws from the different backgrounds of each discipline to expand these factors. An important contribution of theology is to focus on the integration of negativity and resistance by using traditional religious semantics and narratives as examples of how experiences of destruction, despair, meaninglessness, and ultimately, facing death can be an integral part of living a fulfilled life.⁶

Re-reading Tillich in this context explores his idea of *healing "in spite of"* to offer an understanding of the prosperities of *resilience "in spite of"* regarding the integration of negativity and resistance. The first part of this re-reading, therefore, concerns Tillich's idea of *healing*, and the second part the use of the structure of *in spite of*. Both aspects gain prominence throughout Tillich's work from the 1940s onward. The topic of healing is explicitly discussed in a set of

1 Funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – Projektnummer 348851031.

2 Cf. Antonovsky, *Health*.

3 Cf. Wu/Feder et al., *Understanding resilience*, p. 1.

4 Cf. Radbruch, *Die Pfeile*, pp. 172–174.

5 Richter, *Integration of negativity, powerlessness and the role of the mediopassive*, xxx.

6 Cf. Richter/Geiser, *Hilft der Glaube*, p. 14.

articles on the topic of *Religion and Health* distinguishing a religious understanding of healing from magical tendencies. The main points of these articles are integrated into Tillich's attempt at creating a coherent *Systematic Theology* in chapter 4 of the work of the same name.⁷ The "in spite of" can be found as an integral structure throughout the *Systematic Theology* and most prominently explicated in *The Courage to Be*, in the passages where both works deal with existential anxiety.⁸ However, besides focusing on the practical applications of Tillich's theology, the analysis proposed in this article will utilize the sermons compiled in Tillich's collections *The Shaking of the Foundations* (1948), *The New Being* (1955), and *The Eternal Now* (1963) as source materials. The genre of the sermons compels Tillich not to hide behind ontological differentiations but to apply his ontology to existential structures in such a way that it becomes meaningful for his audience.⁹ Therefore, Tillich's sermons do not only illustrate integral aspects of his theology but serve to emphasize the role of narrative elements in communicating existential regards.¹⁰ Hence, the third part of re-reading Tillich concerns the role of the biblical narrations in his sermons and for the act of healing.

2 Who Heals the Healer?

The context of the sermons immediately allows for a unique perspective on healing. Tillich preached in Harvard and later on in Chicago to an academic audience of professional caretakers (among others), therefore focusing on the healer and addressing healing in the context of professional care and the capabilities needed for caretaking.¹¹ The daunting dimension of healing as a

7 Tillich, *Religion and Health*; Tillich, *Religion and Health. Religious, Magical, and Natural Healing*.

8 *The Courage to Be* is generally considered to be Tillich's most popular work. He endeavours to show how the starting point of existential anxiety leads to an understanding of faith in a "God above the God of theism" (Tillich, *The Courage to Be* [henceforth *CtB*], p. 228 et seq.), enabling Tillich to integrate doubt and anxiety into an understanding of faith.

9 Cf. Sturm, *First read my sermons*; on Tillich's reception in homiletics, cf. Jäger, *Glaube*, p. 116 et seq.

10 For a first attempt to understand narrativity as an important part of resilience that will be furthered by the concluding chapter in this article, cf. Opalka, *Was man erzählen kann*, pp. 99–103.

11 The shift to the helper occurs in the fourth year discussions of the "New York Psychology Group" (1941–1946) that Tillich was a part of. The role of the person offering help (be it in psychological or spiritual sense) was brought up by Erich Fromm and regarded as utterly

profession as well as its importance are fully explored by Tillich in the sermon *Heal the Sick; Cast out the Demons*, with which he addressed the graduating students at Union Theological Seminary in 1955 – soon-to-be-pastors whom Tillich wanted to encourage to understand themselves as healers. This is in accordance with Tillich's homiletic claim that preaching is in its essence also healing, and that theology has learned the meaning of grace anew by medicine in being reminded of man's limitation and need for acceptance.¹² In this sermon, Tillich presents healing as the most important and excruciating task in their profession: to be a healer requires a certain amount of risk and a depth of insight into what it means to live life as a human being in this world that almost leads to despair.¹³

Tillich's depiction of healing is multi-layered and slightly differs in each sermon, depending on the subject.¹⁴ However, throughout Tillich's work, healing is closely connected to becoming whole. Therefore, in the two-part sermon *On Healing* in *The New Being*, Tillich regards the different professions that may be concerned with questions of becoming whole. His aim is to show that while both physicians and psychologists have value in aiding to heal either the body *or* the soul (i.e., they only concern themselves with one side of the equation, which leads to Tillich rhetorically asking "but can he make us whole? [...] Certainly not"),¹⁵ Tillich is concerned with the unity of body and soul in a psychosomatic sense.¹⁶ Yet, he would argue that this is in fact one important aspect but that his quest for wholeness and his ideal of becoming whole cannot be reduced to overcoming the estrangement of body and soul. Rather, he uses this dichotomy because it is mirrored in the differentiation of the

critical in a successful intervention as it is closely connected to the aim of help (cf. Tillich/Fromm, *Protocols of the New York Psychology Group* [henceforth NYPG], p. 159). The role of the "caretaker" and their ability to help is still regarded to play an important part in the discourse on resilience, cf. Hauschildt, *Welche Hilfe*.

12 Cf. Tillich, *Communication*, p. 15; cf. Sturm, *First read*.

13 Cf. Tillich, *The Eternal Now* [henceforth TEN], p. 38.

14 For example, the sermon *Salvation* in *The Eternal Now* regards the soteriological aspects of healing and presents the equation that is as simple as it is well known to be central for Tillich's theology: Salvation is healing, and to heal is to make "heal and whole what is sick and disrupted" (Tillich, TEN, p. 77). The close connection between healing and (cosmological) salvation (German: Heil und Heiligung) is explored sufficiently by Grau, *Healing Power* and Schüssler, *Healing Power*; cf. Jäger, *Glaube*, pp. 106–110.

15 Tillich, *The New Being* [henceforth TNB], p. 40.

16 Tillich explores the relation between body and soul specifically in *The Relation of Religion and Health* arguing, in a more psychologically accessible way, for the psyche to be an intermediary between body and soul, which enables a unity that can be described as spiritual healing (cf. Tillich, *Religion and Health. Religious, Magical, and Natural Healing*, p. 52).

professions of physicians and psychologists. Tillich ultimately has a different kind of wholeness in mind.

This can be illustrated if one asks what exactly is the sickness that deserves healing in Tillich's sermon. In *On Healing* it is presented as something that exists but needs no further definition, therefore leading to a sense of vagueness surrounding the topic. This is mirrored in the notable absence of a sermon that explicitly deals with sickness in the collection *The Shaking of the Foundations*. In his work *The New Being* he discusses the solution, whereas *The Shaking of the Foundations* outlines the problem as Tillich explains: "*The New Being* is, so to speak, the answer to the questions developed in *The Shaking of the Foundations*".¹⁷ In this case, if healing is presented as the answer, what is the question that it answers if the immediately obvious topics of sickness, disease, or disability are not mentioned? It is reasonable to assume that for Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* as a whole – from cover to cover – tells of the sickness that is overcome in healing: existence is what deserves healing and what needs to become and be made whole. Therefore, Tillich argues that only a profession concerned with questions of existence, that is the theologian or the philosopher, can approach the question of healing as becoming whole in the first place.¹⁸

In *On Healing*, this interpretation is supported by Tillich's own shift regarding the question of the healer, when he again presents a line of questions to the audience: "Who heals reality? [...] Who reconciles the conflicting forces of our whole existence?"¹⁹ The answer Tillich gives seems to be tautological at first glance: "Only a new reality can make us whole, breaking into the old one, reconciling it with itself".²⁰ Given that he is here concerned with the ontological structure of existence, only another ontological structure can solve this task. Because of its universal strictness, this approach allows to give insights into the interdisciplinary discourse between the so-called life sciences and theology regarding holistic approaches and interventions in dealing with adversity. The difference between the aim of a sermon (or a prayer) and therapeutic intervention can be regarded as follows: a therapeutic setting aims for intervention in overcoming a singular stressor, a definite adversarial experience, or a set of explicit stressors and adversities. In contrast, existential approaches – such as Tillich's – regard living as human beings in the world as already stressful and adversarial – and as such, in need of (constant) intervention to enable

17 Tillich, *TNB*, Preface.

18 Cf. Tillich, *TEN*, p. 40.

19 Tillich, *TNB*, p. 41.

20 Tillich, *TNB*, p. 41.

a resilient attitude towards the world.²¹ Therefore, healing means becoming whole in a sense that covers all existence and all adversarial experiences therein, even though such healing will appear fragmented and only briefly in the limits of existence.²² These converging aims must be disclosed, addressed, and discussed with regard to the applications of a topic such as resilience.²³

This can be further illustrated by recalling Tillich's original concern in his sermons on the topic of healing, namely the healer and their capabilities. When healing is not overcoming sickness but rather making reality whole, the healer is not separated from the one to be healed because of their different relation to sickness; they are both the same, living in the same reality that must be made whole and experiencing the same adversarial existence.²⁴ Therefore, Tillich poses the question: "Who heals the healer?"²⁵ Tillich finds the first part of the answer rather traditionally in his idea of Jesus the Christ, whose New Being is the breakthrough of a new reality into the old reality. In *On Healing*, this seems to be the extent to which Tillich is willing to answer this question, although I will argue for an implicit answer which he gives with regard to the narrative addressed later on.

The context of *Heal the Sick; Cast out the Demons* requires an answer that includes the role of the young theologians to whom he is preaching. Hence, Tillich elaborates on the role of the healers by arguing that they point to the limitations of healing as a concept. As such, while encouraging the young theologians to understand themselves as healers, Tillich calls for one core competence of them: to accept that they themselves must be healed. In accordance with Tillich's claim that to be healed is to be healed from the burden of all existence and to become whole, no one can be truly and constantly healed as long as they are part of the realm of existence. In this case, Tillich's existential ontology leads to a normative claim on healers, namely that they should include the adverse element to get a realistic perception of one's own ability to heal. Tillich explicates this with the introduction of the conjunction *in spite of* regarding the healing capabilities of the soon-to-be pastors: "In spite of your

21 This problem is already noted by Tillich's student Rollo May who made the so-called existential psychology prominent in the US (cf. May, *Concerning Therapeutic Technique*, p. 191).

22 Cf. Tillich, *TEN*, p. 80.

23 Tillich argues that the respective functions of ministers and psychotherapists should not be confused and they should not try to replace each other (cf. Tillich, *CtB*, p. 176 et seq.).

24 Grau argues that already in 1923 Tillich derives an idea of sickness that mirrors the existential estrangement (cf. Grau, *Healing Power*, p. 21).

25 Tillich, *TNB*, p. 41.

own sickness, in spite of the demons working within you and your churches, you have a glimpse of what can heal ultimately".²⁶ Self-aware healing is always healing *in spite of*, namely in spite of one's own need to *be* healed. Thus, for the discourse on resilience, the implications of the *in spite of* structure in Tillich's theology must be explored much more closely than has been done before.²⁷

3 The Constant Struggle of Overcoming "In Spite of"

In spite of is not only a paradigm of Tillich's theology but also a grammatical structure that lends itself to a close and detailed inspection. In analyzing Tillich's use of *in spite of*, one can identify four categories.²⁸

- The first category contains the structure of *an existential experience in spite of another (negative) existential experience*. Both sides of the *in spite of* refer to existential human experiences and can therefore be understood as referring to shared universal experiences even if illustrated by the experience of a single individual. For example, the main structure of acceptance in the 1946 sermon *You are accepted* is outlined as "he found himself accepted in spite of his being rejected"²⁹ with regard to Saint Paul. These passages make Tillich seem accessible from a psychological point of view.³⁰ The *in spite of* regarding existential matters can potentially be replaced by other conjunctions to refer to other types of simultaneous experiences, as in "separated and yet bound, estranged and yet belonging, destroyed and yet preserved."³¹ However, this is not the same for every usage of *in spite of* by Tillich, making the second category seemingly the same at first glance yet fundamentally different.
- The second category comprises *the breakthrough of the ultimate/the essence in spite of an existential experience*, illustrated by another quote from *You are accepted*: "In grace something is overcome; grace occurs 'in spite of'

²⁶ Tillich, *TEN*, p. 41.

²⁷ Such a detailed analysis is strangely absent in the reception of Tillich as an explicit topic, even though it is of course referenced and acknowledged in its paradigmatic character for Tillich's theology as well as in the prosperities of "in spite of" for current discourse (cf. Richter, *Trotzdem*, p. 80 et seq.).

²⁸ The following examples serve to illustrate these preliminary categories. However, they draw from an exhaustive list of the overall usage of "in spite of" in *Systematic Theology*, *The Courage to Be* and the sermons.

²⁹ Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* [henceforth *TSotF*], p. 160.

³⁰ Cf. Jäger, *Glaube*, p. 112.

³¹ Tillich, *TSotF*, p. 160. This observation can be used for the discourse on resilience in regard to which conjunction might be meaningful and meaning-making in a specific situation.

something, *grace occurs in spite of separation and estrangement*.”³² The last part shows this structure most clearly: while separation and estrangement are human experiences, grace is ultimate.³³ The ultimate is perceived as grace that occurs in spite of the existential experience of separation and estrangement. In contrast to the first category, the *in spite of* cannot be replaced by any other conjunction as it is inherent to the existential experience of the ultimate. Hence, an underlying implication in Tillich's theology is that every utterance and experience of the ultimate must contain an element of *in spite of* – whether explicitly named or implied.

- This leads to the third category, “*in spite of*” as a *typological classification* for certain religious phenomena. Tillich uses *in spite of* (written either with quotations marks or dashes) without an object to signify which religious phenomena are inherently “in spite of”, for example: “Faith accepts ‘in spite of’; and out of the ‘in spite of’ of faith, the ‘in spite of’ of courage is born.”³⁴ Besides faith and courage, forgiveness, providence and healing are phenomena *in spite of*.
- Last, Tillich can understand “*in spite of*” as an utterance that replaces utterances of lament, for example: “For the courage of confidence says ‘in spite of’ even to death.”³⁵ Instead of lamenting one's fate, Tillich's suggestion is to defiantly exclaim: “in spite of!”

In analyzing *in spite of* closely, one notices a trend that can be traced throughout Tillich's work: the semantic field of *fighting* permeates the structure of *in spite of*. This is insofar unsurprising as Tillich's experience as a pastor on the front line of World War I is regarded as important background for both his personal and theological development, if not as the main influence of his theology.³⁶ Hence, the roots of *in spite of* can be traced back to the German *Dennoch* that Tillich explores and prominently uses in his early sermons, namely in *Feldpredigten*, the sermons he gave as a pastor on the front line during World War I.³⁷ *Dennoch* is established by Tillich as soldiers' attitude in war,

32 Tillich, *TSotF*, p. 156 [italics added by author].

33 Jäger argues in his close reading of “You are accepted” that Tillich's differentiation of “Being” and “Ground of Being” prevents him from claiming that grace overcomes separation and estrangement (cf. Jäger, *Glaube*, p. 204).

34 Tillich, *CtB*, p. 221.

35 Tillich, *CtB*, p. 219.

36 For the background on Tillich's frontline service and the edition of the early sermons, cf. Sturm, *Apologetik*; Ulrich, *Wir kämpfen*; Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*.

37 The other semantic background of “in spite of” is Luther's “*trotz*” with which he describes his “*Anfechtung*” (cf. Tillich, *CtB*, pp. 216, 220; “*Anfechtung*” in itself is semantically connected to “*fighting*”).

which enables them to experience strength, courage, goodness, joy, and love.³⁸ In later works, *in spite of* is not an explicit attitude in war but is still embedded in semantics of fighting. For example, in the aforementioned sermon *You are accepted*, the idea of grace occurring *in spite of* is elaborated by Tillich as follows:

Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. *It strikes us* when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. *It strikes us* when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual [...]. *It strikes us* when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear.³⁹

The almost hypnotic language created via repetition serves to underline the near violent image of grace striking us.⁴⁰ This becomes even more apparent in the two sermons *The Escape from God*⁴¹ and *God's Pursuit of Man*.⁴² Tillich draws an image of God as an attacker, who relentlessly pursues anyone trying to escape this "attack [of] that which strikes him with unconditional seriousness."⁴³ Given the semantic closeness of *fight* and *in spite of* as presented in the sermons, all the *in spite of* phenomena in Tillich's work can also be understood as attitudes and experiences of fighting. Faith, courage, forgiveness, and providence denote the fighting attitude of those human beings who do not only take existence head on but readily confront the ultimate by which they are grasped. The permeating semantic of fight and its consequences for Tillich's theology can only be touched upon briefly here and need to be further explored; for example, in regard to semantics of the ongoing COVID-19

38 Cf. Tillich, *Frühe Predigten*, pp. 473–476. Tillich's ambiguous role and his at least partly enthusiastic patriotism as a frontline preacher deserves a closer inspection. Both Sturm (*Apologetik*) and Ulrich (*Wir kämpfen*) argue that Tillich's role as a counsellor leads him to an apologetic attitude in regard to the war efforts even though he may not fully agree with this stance. Shearn points out that Tillich uses contradictory motifs to help counselling and encouraging soldiers while trying to remain theologically coherent (cf. Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*).

39 Tillich, *TSotF*, p. 161 et seq. [italics added by author]. Despite their close reading of "You are accepted", neither Jäger nor Nord analyze or further explore this semantic of fight although they repeat it in their own language usage (cf. Jäger, *Glaube*, p. 204 et seq.; Nord, *Predigen*).

40 Cf. Jäger, *Glaube*, p. 215. Given that Tillich dedicated the sermon to himself, this might give an insight into Tillich's own experience of faith.

41 Tillich, *TSotF*, pp. 38–51.

42 Tillich, *TEN*, pp. 68–75.

43 Tillich, *TEN*, p. 70.

pandemic: In the public image, health care professionals are often perceived as front line workers who are fighting a battle with an invisible enemy.⁴⁴ These semantic representations of war are considered to be ambiguous at best and damaging for the mental health of the health care professionals at worst: Understanding themselves as being at war can put undue stress or blame on individuals and lead to fatalistic attitudes.⁴⁵ Therefore, to determine Tillich's contribution to the discourse on resilience in this context, it is significant to point out the following: Tillich's understanding of human existence as a continuous struggle *in spite of* implies that existence in itself is profoundly exhausting and deeply tiring. Although Tillich does not explicitly draw that conclusion, to live such an existence is to be constantly ready for a battle and on the lookout for an attack that will inevitably strike you – an experience so powerful that it necessarily triggers a fight or flight response.

On the one hand, this may be regarded as a very realistic depiction of the human condition. Tillich's *in spite of* can be relevant as an expression that helps to cope with adversarial experiences in a fighting spirit.⁴⁶ Although Tillich's language of becoming whole seems to quite easily lend itself to discourses on the holistic aspects of healing, the element of overcoming is necessarily implied and might very well point to an often-neglected aspect of holistic approaches. Regarding the potential of Tillich's *in spite of* for the discourse on resilience, *in spite of* as an expression as well as an attitude offers a way of integrating negativity into an understanding of resilience. Tillich gives a realistic account of what life feels like in a world that has become fundamentally adversarial. Tillich's own background for this assessment comprises his experiences in the war and as an immigrant as well as the shared contemporary anxiety in a world shaken by World War II and the advent of the atomic bomb in its foundations. Nevertheless, the *in spite of* might be relatable for those who experience their world as adversarial. Rather than expressing anxiety, doubt, or despair in the form of lament, expressing anguish in the form of *in spite of* might help those who need to reconcile their current state of being with a necessarily vague or even seemingly absurd hope (e.g., at the end of one's life in palliative care or in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic). Uttering an *in spite of* can be a meaningful way of integrating negativity into a resilient attitude.

44 Cf. Wicke/Bolognesi, *Framing COVID-19*, pp. 12–16.

45 Cf. Semino, *Not Soldiers*, p. 51 et seq. The metaphor of war and its critical assessment are well-established in oncology and might serve as “cautionary tale” for COVID-19 (Marron et al., *Waging War*, p. 625).

46 Without reflecting explicitly on the semantics of fighting, Schüssler/Sturm seem to imply that the reference to fighting is what makes “You are accepted” so relatable and one of the most well-known sermons of Tillich (cf. Schüssler/Sturm, *Tillich*, p. 205 et seq.).

On the other hand, I would argue that this is not a sustainable attitude. For Tillich, the whole existence, every dimension of a human life as a well as the ontological structure of the cosmos can and should be understood with regard to this ongoing fight without a moment of rest.⁴⁷ It also deserves further attention that Tillich's theology offers no room for lament and for the delay that comes with lamenting one's fate. In the semantics of fighting, the reaction to adversarial experiences must be immediate; in a way, one cannot stop on the battlefield to reflect on what is happening but must take immediate action when being attacked.⁴⁸ This has consequences for further explorations with regard to the healer's capability to heal *in spite of*. The *in spite of* structure of healing implies that becoming whole partakes in the semantics of fighting, as becomes most apparent in Tillich's conclusion of the first part of *On Healing*: "Our bodies ail and die, our souls are restless, our world is a battlefield of individuals and groups. But the new reality cannot be thrown out. [...] For it is the power of reconciliation whose work is wholeness."⁴⁹ To paraphrase Tillich, to become whole is to overcome and conquer in and through fighting. This mirrors the ontological structure that Tillich assumes for Being-Itself, insofar Being becomes Being-Itself by overcoming and conquering Non-Being.⁵⁰ Yet, I would argue that in the realms of existence, becoming (whole) and overcoming/conquering remain semantically incongruent and must be mediated beyond the *in spite of* structure. Therefore, it is noteworthy that Tillich seemingly disregards that contradiction in the second part of *On Healing* and opens instead by asking: "How do we paint Jesus the Christ?"⁵¹

4 Healing Stories and Stories of Healing

In accordance with the aforementioned, Tillich focuses on Jesus the Christ as the Healer who brings a wholeness of the mind and body that neither physicians nor psychologists can achieve. However, how Tillich reaches that conclusion in the second part of *On Healing* adds an important element, namely that of narrativity and of the role played by stories in Tillich's understanding

47 The German references Schopenhauer: "Ein Kampf auf Leben und Tod geht in allem vor [...]. Er ist eine universale Struktur des Lebens", in: Tillich, *Systematische Theologie III*, p. 530.

48 Shearn points out that at the end of World War I Tillich's own exhaustion in the war as well as his doubt become apparent in his sermons and letters (cf. Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*).

49 Tillich, *TSotF*, p. 42.

50 Cf. Tillich, *CtB*, p. 156 et seq.

51 Tillich, *TNB*, p. 42.

of healing.⁵² Tillich applies his method of correlations to homiletics, which is most often reviewed in his use of an accessible, contemporary language that seemingly replaces traditional forms.⁵³ However, in *On Healing* Tillich explicitly states the relevance of stories – and especially of biblical stories – in the process of healing: Jesus comes to be known by the reader of the gospels as Christ via the Gospel's narration of Jesus the Healer. Therefore, according to Tillich, aiming for salvation and healing requires a certain way of narrating Jesus as Christ the Healer, namely painting him in such an expressive language that his healing power becomes so vivid that the listeners cannot escape the story's grasp. Tillich uses such evocative language to convey this point:

How do we paint Jesus the Christ? The stories in the Gospel of Matthew contribute to the answer; they add a color, an expression, a trait of great intensity, they paint Him as the healer: It is astonishing that this color, this vivid expression of His nature, this powerful trait of His character, has been more and more lost in our time. The grayish colors of a moral teacher, the tense expression of a social reformer, the soft traits of a suffering servant have prevailed, at least amongst our painters and theologians and life-of-Jesus-novelists; perhaps not so much in the hearts of people who need somebody to heal them.⁵⁴

To bring about salvation, a preacher (and a theologian) must narrate Christ as the Healer in as expressive, colorful, and powerful a way as possible – not for the sake of Christ but for the sake of those in need of healing. The aspects of healing as becoming whole and healing *in spite of* are now on two different levels: according to Tillich, the preacher must narrate Jesus as Christ the Healer, who makes whole and who helps us to become whole; yet, they must shape this narration as a narrative that grasps people *in spite of*. At this point,

52 Emphasizing the narrative elements of Tillich's Christology can add to the discourse on whether Tillich's Christology is subject oriented (cf. Danz, *Religion*, pp. 218–224), transcending subjective piety in a universal and cosmological sense (cf. Neugebauer, *Frühe Christologie*, pp. 289–292) or a psycho-dynamic quest for unity between individuals and society (cf. Munzinger, *Bejahtes Leben*). Narrativity aims to disclose that subjectivity in itself is based on collective processes of meaning-making by the stories and the very act of storytelling and enacting narratives (cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; Ricœur, *Soi-même*). Even though Tillich establishes the “New Being” as a contemporary and accessible semantic for his time, he still derives his Christological impulses from biblical tradition.

53 Jäger, *Glaube*, pp. 153, 193 et seq.

54 Tillich, *TNB*, p. 43.

it is necessary to make Tillich's distinction between healing stories that tell of a healing (narrations) and stories that heal (narratives) explicit.⁵⁵

Tillich's own emphasis is on the distinction between the miraculous qualities of such stories and their healing powers, urging pastors to make this distinction clear and present in their sermons, to avoid confusion and to set forth a chain of stories that (potentially) have healing power.⁵⁶ Tillich seems to presume that following the lead of the Gospel, telling stories of being grasped by healing power can set forth an act of healing in the same vein as stories of Christ as the Healer can. At the end of part II of the sermon *On Healing* the implicit question: "Who can heal?", is answered differently yet again by Tillich: healing is brought about "by those *who can tell* us that they have experienced His healing power, that the New Being *has* grasped their bodies and their soul, that they *have* become whole and sane again, that salvation *has* come upon them."⁵⁷ Tillich implicitly claims that the most important quality of pastors as healers is the ability to tell a story *in spite of*, which aims for wholeness and can reference performative moments of grace in which a story has grasped the narrators themselves. For this reason, Tillich regards both the telling and the re-telling of the healing stories as the most important part of preaching (and counseling, respectively). However, as mentioned before, Tillich claims that Jesus as Christ the Healer heals by making reality whole. Although Tillich does not draw this consequence, understanding reality as fundamentally in need of healing offers the possibility to discuss our relation to what constitutes sickness and disability if both the healer and the person in need of healing must be healed – albeit in different regards. Stahl points out that this challenges ideas of disability and being healed in Christian traditions, insofar universalizing the need for healing questions all approaches that focus on a special group of people with disabilities.⁵⁸

55 This seems to be a hermeneutical clue of Tillich's reading of the Gospel worth following. Tillich points out: "It is one of the most memorable facts in biblical stories about Jesus that a large part of them are healing stories" (Tillich, *TEN*, p. 79).

56 Tillich, *Religion and Health. Religious, Magical, and Natural Healing*, pp. 44–47. Interestingly enough, understanding Tillich as a therapeutical preacher and telling stories of people experiencing healing by reading Tillich is part of his reception history. For example, Parrella starts his re-reading of Tillich's sermons with: "Let me share three other stories that expose the power of Tillich's preaching" (Parrella, *Re-Reading*, p. 368). Nord reflects on this as part of her homiletic approach and analyzes how "You are accepted" can have an effect on the "Lebensführung" (Nord, *Predigen*, p. 416 et seq.).

57 Tillich, *TNB*, p. 45.

58 Cf. Stahl, *Reimagining*, p. 176 et seq. Wilder concludes with the same argument, while emphasizing that Tillich uses disease inconsistently and seems to suggest a problematic conflation of sin and disability (cf. Wilder, *On Christ*, p. 210).

Healing, for Tillich, is not a matter of technical ability but is at least partly reliant on the art of storytelling *in spite of*. This influences how we regard talking about resilience or healing: resilience and healing are not just terms but narratives in themselves that are often embedded in colorful, expressive, intense stories and in processes of storytelling. As can be shown for Tillich's Christology, we do not gain an understanding of healing or resilience out of nowhere but find them deeply interwoven in a network of narrations that have been and will be told. I add that healing and resilience require the ability to understand narrativity, carefully extract narrative elements, and artfully use them to paint images that can speak to those in need of healing.

5 The Art of Communicating Healing and Resilience *in spite of*

How might healers and counselors communicate in this way in practical settings? With Tillich's ambiguous description of the healer, an important element can be added to the resilience factors, namely the integration of negativity and resistance as parts of – and not the opposite of – resilience and becoming whole. In talking about resilience and healing, it can be tempting to completely disregard and devalue sickness and adversity; however, that would be to also disregard and devalue important parts of life stories. Healing and resilience understood as *healing and resilience in spite of* can name, admit, and value adversity or sickness without elevating them, as in some mystical understandings of suffering.⁵⁹ Therefore, both the ability to differentiate when to tell about adversity and resilience *in spite of* and when to focus on the aspects of becoming whole, serve to integrate negativity into telling narrations of resilience *in spite of*.

In this regard, Tillich's implicit narratological approach in accordance with his explicit understanding of the process of healing can add insight into the narrative character of resilience: storytelling is storytelling *in spite of*. This has added consequences for the person attempting to heal by stories and narrations: by referencing Tillich, the healer must be self-aware that they are healing *in spite of*; in the same way, the healer as a narrator must be self-aware that they are narrating *in spite of*. For example, deciding whether to include an element of *in spite of* or whether the semantic field of fighting or silence is more appropriate depends on the narrator's sensibilities. As pointed out, this gains importance the longer the COVID-19 pandemic lasts: when all experiences in a health care setting are perceived as fundamentally adversarial and

59 Cf. Tillich, *CtB*, p. 214 et seq.

of indeterminate length, semantic representations of war may help to endure. However, if every aspect of everyday life becomes permeated by the semantics of war an existential exhaustion may take place. In everyday storytelling, these sensibilities in the use of semantic representations of war and fighting might be applied intuitively, and they can be honed in professional settings.⁶⁰ In accordance with Tillich, I argue that the element of *in spite of* is persistent in the act of telling stories that aim to foster resilience or healing. Fundamentally, whether such narratives truly set forth an experience of healing or resilience occurs in itself *in spite of*, namely *in spite of* all the other effects that such a story could have (none, adverse, or something completely different).

For religious professionals, experience in handling the polyvalent and often ambiguous nature of religious language – as mirrored, for example, in the biblical stories – recommends itself. The narrative image of Jesus Christ as the Healer, as it is depicted in the biblical stories, can serve as a sort of training ground to appropriate hope *in spite of*, so that it may be accessed during a stressful and adversarial experience both by the person trying to heal and the person expressing a need to be healed. People experiencing a type of crisis that cannot be traced back even to the most ominous set of stressors, who are facing situations where all interventions and interpersonal means fail and maybe can *only* fail, still need a way to express their distress as well as their hopes. The function of religious narratives is not to mimic a therapeutic intervention; they do not represent an analytical or therapeutic strategy for conflict solving but rather serve as immediate expressions of hopelessness and despair as well as immediate expressions of hope for healing and salvation *in spite of*.

Biography

Katharina Opalka studied protestant theology in Marburg and Göttingen; followed by a "Vikariat" in the Protestant Lutheran Church of Hannover; since 2014 at the Protestant Faculty at the Rheinische-Friedrich-Wilhelms University of Bonn as a research assistant in Systematic Theology; since 2019 in the DFG-FOR 2686 "Resilience in Religion and Spirituality".

60 This touches on the complex phenomenon of empathy in professional contexts, cf. Breyer/Jahnsen, *Empathie*, p. 45.

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