

The Fight for Eternity in Paul Tillich's First World War Sermons

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This article analyses a selection of archival material written by Paul Tillich, particularly his early parish sermons and sermons from World War I. Although the themes of 'eternity' and 'the soul' are rare in the early parish sermons and only appear in the context of death or suffering, they play a predominant role in the World War I sermons. This article suggests that this is because, for Tillich, suffering became the interpretative key. Through his sermons amidst the suffering and devastation of war Tillich employed what he called the immanent way of theology.

Paul Tillich (1886–1965) experienced World War I as a military chaplain. His experiences had a profound effect, both personally and theologically. Tillich joined the army in October 1914 and served as a military chaplain with the Seventh Division in the trenches on the Western Front.¹ Here, he lost fellow soldiers and close friends. His

AHBPU = Abteilung für Historische Bestände, Philipps-Universität, Marburg; GW = Paul Tillich and Erdmann Strum (eds), *Gesammelte Werke: Ergänzungs- und Nachlaßbände*, VII: *Frühe Predigten, 1909–1918*, Berlin 2020; HDS = Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University; PTA = Paul-Tillich-Marburg Archivs an der UB Marburg; PTP: Paul Tillich papers

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¹ Gary Dorrien, 'Religious socialism, Paul Tillich, and the abyss of estrangement', *Social Research: An International Quarterly* lxxxv/2 (2018), 425–52 at p. 431.

own experiences included being hospitalised three times and suffering the first of two nervous breakdowns during the battle of Verdun in May 1916,² only months after he first came under heavy fire. He spent two of his four years in the war preaching under trees, in caves and in the trenches together with another, Catholic, chaplain at the front line.³ He had a second nervous breakdown in April 1918 and asked to be discharged from service. His request was denied, and he remained on active service until the end of the war.⁴ He was awarded two medals, one of them the Iron Cross.⁵

Heroism, as well as trust in God, was, according to Joseph F. Byrnes's studies of religion and the Western Front, a key theme for German chaplains during the war. It was a way of finding a religious meaning in the violence as well as a way of keeping spirits up as the war dragged on.⁶ German chaplains were, however, not expected to take part in the fighting.⁷ Instead, they stayed behind the lines, ready to minister to the soldiers before and after combat.⁸ Many German military chaplains had only received basic army training after conscription. Moreover, there were no clear regulations from either the army or the Church on what they should be doing. This resulted in many chaplains starting their service in the army without proper preparation or experience.⁹ Furthermore, mainly because the German army was spread over a very large area, there were few opportunities for them to meet informally and share their experiences. Conferences and theological instruction courses did take place during the war, as Hanneke Takken has pointed out, but this happened more often on the Eastern than on the Western Front where Tillich was stationed.¹⁰ The Western Front was, moreover, devastated by

² Both the battle of Verdun and the battle of Somme had devastating effects on the forces. There were 800,000 German and French casualties in the battle of Verdun alone, while it was a common danger to drown in the mud of the battle of Somme where some 175,000 Germans died. It is therefore no surprise that it was common among German writers to refer to Verdun as 'the hell of Verdun': P. Jenkins, *The great and holy war: how World War I changed religion for ever*, New York 2014, 56–8.

³ Dorrien, 'Abbyss of estrangement', 431. For anti-Catholic attitudes among the German forces see Jenkins, *The great and holy war*, 77–8.

⁴ Dorrien, 'Abbyss of estrangement', 432.

⁵ S. A. Shearn, *Pastor Tillich: the justification of the doubter*, Oxford 2022, 182. For more detail on Tillich's experiences of the war see W. Pauck and M. Pauck, *Paul Tillich: his life and thought*, New York–Hagerstown–San Francisco–London 1976, 40–56. They are described as 'the turning point'.

⁶ J. F. Byrnes, *God on the Western Front: soldiers and religion in World War I*, University Park, PA 2023, 65.

⁷ This was similar to the British chaplains and dissimilar from the French: *ibid.* 87.

⁸ *Ibid.* 88–9.

⁹ H. Takken, *Churches, chaplains and the Great War*, London–New York 2019, 108.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 109–13.

bombing, destroyed buildings and breaks in communication to such a degree that chaplains stationed there could often find themselves having spent all day travelling – often on horseback – to get to the front-line troops only to find that they had moved to another location.¹¹ Because of the amount of travelling, chaplains carried with them a special case with the liturgical material they needed for performing their job.¹²

Military chaplains were not only responsible for religious duties but for a wide range of what Takken refers to as 'side jobs', namely maintaining the morale and the fighting power of the troops.¹³ Additionally, they were in close contact with the field hospitals, provided links between the front and the soldiers' families and friends back home, and even helped to arrange visits.¹⁴ All these aspects of the job are to be found in the Tillich archival material. Maintaining morale was, according to Takken, especially important, as it was felt to be closely linked to state politics. Thus chaplains described the war as being fought for German culture and religion.¹⁵ Patrick Porter has described German Lutheran chaplains as part of the war machine: they sanctified the war through their front-line ministry and this in turn implicated them in the sacrifices of the war.¹⁶ The link between nationalism and religion is also found in Tillich's sermons.

Takken also emphasises that the military chaplain was only human, and thus not exempt from the very personal struggles of the war.¹⁷ This again is

¹¹ Ibid. 165. W. Meteling called the war on the Western Front a site of experimentation: 'German and French regiments on the western front, 1914–1918', in H. Jones, J. O'Brien and C. Schmidt-Supprian (eds), *Untold war: new perspectives in First World War studies*, Leiden–Boston 2008, 23–62 at pp. 32–40. In her studies of German and French regiments on the Western Front, she notes (p. 37) that one of the key characteristics of the war was 'the enormous discrepancy between the massive destructive power available and the underdeveloped state of communication technology'.

¹² Takken, *Churches*, 167.

¹³ Ibid. 237–8.

¹⁴ Byrnes, *God on the Western Front*, 88–9.

¹⁵ Takken, *Churches*, 82. Patrick Porter, describes how German war chaplains were more politically inclined than the British: 'New Jerusalem: sacrifice and redemption on the war experiences of English and German military chaplains', in P. Purseigle (ed.), *Warfare and belligerence: perspectives in First World War Studies*, Leiden–Boston 2005, 101–32 at p. 119. Jenkins describes the strong German tradition of Church-State ties where the Prussian tradition of an alliance with the Lutheran Church resulted in the Kaiser being understood as occupying a political-clerical role as *summus episcopus*: *The great and holy war*, 67.

¹⁶ Porter, 'New Jerusalem', 101. On military chaplains Porter further states (p. 104) that 'unlike the homeland clergy, they ministered to their flock at the frontlines. More than the homeland clergy, they were directly implicated in the deaths and maiming of their nation's manhood. Because they preached men into lethal combat, and gave divine sanction to protracted industrial war, they were responsible for abetting it'.

¹⁷ Takken, *Churches*, 237–8.

clear from the archival material, especially in Tillich's letters to his family and reports from the front.¹⁸ That the war had a profound effect on him personally as well as theologically is evident in the degree to which he used the themes of 'eternity' and 'the soul' in his sermons from before the war compared with his sermons, letters and reports during the war. In the sermons that Tillich delivered before the war, he rarely spoke about eternity and the soul. However, when he did mention them, it was mostly in the context of suffering. During World War I, there was a significant shift: Tillich began to emphasise the importance of eternity and the soul. I believe that this change can be attributed to Tillich's notion of the 'immanent way of theology'. Tillich uses this concept to describe the importance of sermons, which is also related to eternity and the soul. In this article, a contribution to work on the development of Tillich's early theology, I suggest that Tillich's experience of suffering during the war had a fundamental impact on his theology. As a result, the concepts of eternity and the soul, which Tillich had previously only mentioned briefly, came to play a major role in his theology.

Gary Dorrien has shown that Tillich left the war with 'one searing conviction': the only kind of theology that deserved to be written had to address the 'abyss of estrangement' that he experienced in four years of horror at the front.¹⁹ His conviction that theology has an existential focus, particularly concerning the war experiences, led Tillich to reexamine aspects of his theology.²⁰ His sermons provide important insight into Tillich himself and his theology, and how they changed in the course of the war.

Tillich's sermons can be divided into three distinct periods:²¹ his early parish sermons (1909–14); his sermons delivered as a military chaplain during World War I (1914–18);²² and his American sermons.²³ The context of the periods differs, as does Tillich's evolving assessment of the chaplain's task. Tillich delivered his early parish sermons in various suburbs of Berlin. They were part of his ministerial training and

¹⁸ For Tillich's autobiographical reflections on the war see his *On the boundary: an autobiographical sketch*, New York 1967, 21–2, 28, 32–3, 52, 61, 95.

¹⁹ Dorrien, 'Abyss of estrangement', 427. For an overview of Tillich's time in the war see pp. 430–2. For Tillich's own description of the abyss of existence related to his war experiences see *On the boundary*, 52.

²⁰ Dorrien, 'Abyss of estrangement', 427. Dorrien quotes Tillich (p. 431) as saying, with regard to the battle of Champagne in 1915, that 'all that horrible, long night I walked along the rows of dying men, and much of my German classical philosophy broke down that night'. He further states (p. 432) that Tillich believed the war to have caused a personal *kairos* for him.

²¹ Here I follow E. Strum, "'First, read my sermons!'" Tillich as preacher', in R. R. Manning (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Tillich*, Cambridge 2009, 105–20.

²² These sermons cover almost the entire duration of the war, as they were delivered between October 1914 and the summer of 1918: *ibid.* 110. ²³ *Ibid.* 109.

reflected his initial understanding of the task of the chaplain as one of reiterating the Christian message to the Christian congregation. However, this was not the case with the second group of sermons. Tillich's World War I sermons can be divided into two categories, as Tillich himself noted in a report to his army provost. The first was contemplative, employing a mystical and comforting tone. These sermons were primarily directed to soldiers at the front and were used predominately by Tillich during the war. The second form was motivational, used to motivate soldiers and to relate to their inner moral struggles.²⁴ The context of the war sermons was the battlefield²⁵ and the audience were Tillich's companions in the war, caught in an existential and spiritual crisis. The third group, Tillich's American sermons, was delivered in the context of being invited to attend church services in academic settings: here Tillich is speaking as a theologian.²⁶ In this article, I will focus on the second group, Tillich's sermons from World War I, although I will track themes and their further development from his early sermons as well, using a selection of early parish sermons and his sermons from World War I. In my archival work, I am inspired by Jane E. Sayers's emphasis on the ability of archival work to bring the past into relationship with the future *via* the present,²⁷ Barbara Craig's theories on the selection process in archival appraisal,²⁸ Dietmar Schenk's insistence on source criticism in archival work,²⁹ and Robert Kretschmar's stressing of the impossibility of a neutral transmission of archival material.³⁰ As none of this material has been translated into English elsewhere and some of it is unpublished, this necessitates the use of long quotations.

²⁴ Tillich's use of both these forms of sermons causes Strum to describe them as 'a highly developed war theology': *ibid.* 111. In a later report from the war Tillich expanded his view of the task of the chaplain, adding a third key component to his war sermons in addition to the motivational and the contemplative elements.

²⁵ For statistics on the suffering involved in the German war effort see, for example, A. Duménil, 'Soldiers' suffering and military justice in the German army of the Great War', in J. MacLeod and P. Purseigle (eds), *Uncovered fields: perspectives in First World War studies*, Leiden 2003, 43–60 at p. 45. Duménil concludes (p. 48) that suffering was made into a normal aspect of existence at the front.

²⁶ Strum, 'Tillich as preacher', 109. These groups of sermons do, however, have certain 'characteristically Tillichian features' in common.

²⁷ B. Craig, *Archival appraisal: theory and practice*, Berlin 2004, 129.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 129f.

²⁹ "'Archivmacht" und geschichtliche Wahrheit', in R. Hering and D. Schenk (eds), *Wie mächtig sind Archive? Perspektiven der Archiwissenschaft*, Hamburg 2013, 21–44 at p. 36.

³⁰ 'Quellensicherung im institutionellen Rahmen: Zur Macht und Ohnmacht der Archive bei der Überlieferungsbildung', *ibid.* 45–63 at p. 54.

Eternity and the soul in Tillich's sermons from before the war

To understand the evolution of Tillich's use of 'eternity' and 'the soul' in his World War I sermons, it is necessary to analyse how these themes were employed in his earlier parish sermons, so as to help us to identify the changes and developments in his theology. Tillich's sermons from before the war cover several themes,³¹ which appear much more than themes such as 'soul' (*Seele*) and 'eternity' (*Ewigkeit*). When these two themes do appear, however, it is almost always in regard to suffering (*Leid*) and concern/care (*Sorge*). Tillich thus emphasises comfort in God amidst suffering: the soul is the active part of the human being which, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, seeks God. The notion of the seeking soul is, furthermore, related to the theme of eternity, as the restless soul seeks eternal calm, i.e. God.

One example of suffering and the soul being mentioned together in the early parish sermons can be found in a sermon on Psalm li.³² Here, Tillich states that 'the sufferer has comfort in God's presence; the godforsaken soul cries out to God to help him'.³³ This sermon emphasises that the soul is the part of the human being that seeks God during times of suffering. The soul is seen as the active component during such experiences. Later in the sermon, Tillich clarifies his understanding of the soul by referring to the human being's whole being and the human being's death, temporal as well as inner, in relation to the soul.³⁴ Death, in addition to suffering, is a theme in this sermon: Tillich states:

³¹ Strum lists the following themes (p. 110): 'Evil, a tool in god's hand'; 'We must learn to wait'; 'Christ and joy'; 'Of the drunkenness and sobriety of the soul'; 'The mystery of the crowd'; 'Of the suffering of isolation'; and 'Of eternal peace in the midst of time'. To these may be added 'Darkness opposed to light' (found, for example, in an untitled sermon on 1Thessalonians v.4–8, published at *GW* vii. 227–33, and 'God's care as holy love', an untitled sermon on Psalm xc.1, at *GW* vii. 118–21.

³² Tillich, sermon on Ps. li, handwritten, in German, n.d., PTP, 1894–1974, HDS, bMS 649/16 (3); *GW*vii. 173–9.

³³ 'der Leidende hat Trost in Gottes Gegenwart; des Gottverlassenen Seele schreit zu Gott, der ihm hilft': Tillich, sermon on Ps. li, handwritten, in German, n.d., PTP, 1894–1974, HDS, bMS 649/16 (3), 1.

³⁴ 'Der Mut eines Menschen, der so vor Gott tritt, ist noch grösser. Auch er spricht damit sein Todesurteil. Aber er ist mehr als der zeitliche Tod, der ihm bevorsteht. Sein ganzes Wesen, seine Seele ist dem Tode verfallen. Und es ist nicht ein zukünftiger Tod, der vielleicht noch abgewendet werden kann, sondern es ist der gegenwärtige innere Tod, der Gottes Zorn wirkt' ('The courage of a human being who comes before God in this way is even greater. He also speaks his death sentence with it. But it is more than temporal death that is in store for him. His whole being, his soul is subjected to death. And it is not a future death, which can perhaps still be averted, it is a present inner death, which God's wrath causes'): *ibid.* 2.

What kind of tremendous force is that which loads people with the heaviest burdens, tears apart all the bonds of nature and happiness, makes daily misery and yet brings no peace? It is the anxiety of a death that is much more terrible than all earthly burdens and all deaths, of a death that might happen in the middle of life.³⁵

Death can thus be temporal, i.e. physical, and inner, i.e. spiritual. Both temporal and inner death as well as suffering will be closely tied to the soul in Tillich's World War I sermons. Tillich encourages the congregation to 'pray together with the psalmist, with the prophets and Apostles, with all those who are crushed in spirit'.³⁶ Thus, prayer too is important amid suffering.

In another of the early parish sermons, which is unfortunately both untitled, undated and not noted to be related to a specific biblical verse, Tillich states that when the human being in its weakness and abandonment of prayer needs comfort, the Holy Spirit will maintain communion with God on his behalf.³⁷ And in the act of praying, which, as in Tillich's sermon on Ps. li, is important amidst suffering, the soul also plays a role: in praying the human being raises its whole soul to God:

Has it not yet happened to someone that his heart was full and he wanted to come before God and talk to him and pour out his heart in the words of prayer and the words were missing, it was like a child's stammering, and we searched and struggled, but this deepest feeling of the heart could not be put into words; and perhaps it is always like that, the most fervent prayer is just pure wordless sobbing, in which we raise our whole soul to God, but this sobbing is wrought by the Spirit, and therefore it is more a word than many words and therefore it contains more than a long prayer.³⁸

³⁵ 'Was ist das für eine ungeheure Gewalt, die den Menschen die schwersten Lasten auflädt, alle Bande der Natur und der Glücks zerreisst, tägliche Qualen macht und doch keine Frieden bringt? Es ist die Angst vor einem Sterben, das viel fürdtbarer ist als alle irdischen Lasten und alles Sterben, vor einem Sterben, das mitten im Leben vielleicht werden muss': *ibid.* 4.

³⁶ 'So last uns den mit dem Psalmisten, mit den Propheten und Aposteln, mit allen, die zerschlagenen Geistes sind ..., also beten': *ibid.* 7.

³⁷ 'und weil Paulus bisher von der Herrlichkeit der Gotteskindschaft gesprochen hat, darum kommt er hier darauf zu seigen, wie diese Herrlichkeit auch nicht durch die Schwachheit des Gebets gestört werden kann. Das ist ja die Zerstörung der Kindschaft, wenn das Gebet aufhört, wenn Vater und Kind nicht mehr miteinander verkehren, und das Fleisch und seine Schwachheit bringt uns immer wieder in diese Gefahr, wir kennen sie alle, und wir alle brauchen den Trost, das in solchen Zeiten der Schwachheit der Geist selbst für ins eintritt und die Gemeinschaft mit Gott für uns erhält': *ibid.* 1.

³⁸ 'Nem ist es noch nicht so ergangen, dass sein Herz voll war und er vor Gott treten wollte und zu ihm reden und sein Herz ausschütten in die Worte des Gebets und die Worte fehlten, es war wie das Stammeln eines Kindes, und wir suchten und mühten uns, aber dieses tiefste Seinfzhen des Herzens, es konnte doch nicht in Worte gefasst

According to Tillich, in raising its soul to God in this sobbing wrought by the Spirit, the human being comes before God. Just as in the sermon on Ps. li, the soul is seen as the active part of the human being during hard times and suffering. Tillich ends the sermon by praising the ‘wonderful, holy consolation: this quiet and comforting work of the Spirit’.³⁹ Thus, in suffering, God comforts the suffering human being – something which will also be seen in Tillich’s World War I sermons.

It is worth mentioning one more point from the analysis of Tillich’s early parish sermons, namely how, in a few early parish sermons, he mentioned eternity in the same sermons that he referred to the soul. One such sermon, on Hebrews i.9–11, was delivered in Lankwitz, probably in 1909.⁴⁰ Tillich begins by describing God as ‘the calm from eternity to eternity’⁴¹ and the human being’s soul as ‘restless from day to day’.⁴² Yet if anyone believes that the eternal laws of nature could give their soul peace, they have, according to Tillich, not yet heard the ‘longing’ voice of their soul. This voice says that, while everything seems great and wonderful, everyone suffers restlessness and aimlessness and yearns for meaning.⁴³ The soul says: ‘this is not my final rest’.⁴⁴ The soul is driven on by restlessness, so that it does not linger, but continues to strive. And through all this, God is with the human being as an ‘eternal calm in the middle of time’.⁴⁵ With this knowledge, the human can achieve a peace that transcends turmoil and unrest, namely the eternal rest of God.⁴⁶ In the early parish sermons, the concepts of eternity and the soul are thus frequently mentioned together. They are used with regard to the human being’s relationship to God, something which the whole human being – i.e. the soul – seeks during hard and suffering times.

It seems natural that Tillich, when he was faced with the devastating suffering of the war, would turn to these two themes which he had used before the war in the rare instances when he preached on suffering and death. As emphasised by E. W. H. King, contrary to what he refers to as ‘popular understandings of the war’, the experiences of soldiers of the war were

werden; und vielleicht ist es immer so, das inbrünstigste Gebet ist nur ein wortloses Soufzen, in dem wir unsere ganze Seele zu Gott emportragen, aber dieses Soufzen ist vo Geist gewirkt, und darum ist es mehr wort als viele Worte und darum bringt er mehr in als langes Gebet’: Tillich, ‘Untitled sermon’ [Welkiergspredigten], handwritten, in German, n.d., PTA, AHPBU, 039/11, 4–5.

³⁹ ‘wunderbarer, heiliger Trost: dieses stille und tröstende wirken des Geistes’: *ibid.* 6.

⁴⁰ This sermon is not dated, but it is placed between other sermons dated to 1909 on both sides in the archival material.

⁴¹ ‘Gott ist die Ruhe von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit’: Tillich, sermon on Heb. i.9–11, handwritten, in German, n.d., PTA, AHPBU, 039/18, 1.

⁴² ‘Unsere Seele aber ist unruhig von Tag zu Tag’: *ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.* 2.

⁴⁴ ‘Hier ist meine letzte Ruhe nicht’: *ibid.*

⁴⁵ ‘Gott ist bei uns, die ewige Ruge ist mitten in der Zeit’: *ibid.* 4

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

not restricted to the trenches. Soldiers were never entirely removed from the civilian front and they were not necessarily alienated from their prewar selves.⁴⁷ Thus it was entirely possible that Tillich would use and further develop themes from his prewar days.

Eternity and the soul in Tillich's World War I sermons

In Tillich's World War I sermons, the idea of the active soul is developed into that of the 'hero soul' and the eternal calm is deepened to give it the sense of an eternal stillness, needed to remain strong in the war. Furthermore, eternity and soul are combined in Tillich's understanding of heroism, which, according to him, is to die for eternity. Tillich believed the human being's soul to be in their own hands, and, as the human being should care for eternity, so should the human being fight for eternity in the war. Thus, the themes of eternity and the soul are shaped by the suffering in the war and the resulting need for strength and stillness. At the same time, these experiences imbued the war with meaning.

Tillich describes the hero soul in an untitled war sermon on Luke ii.⁴⁸ Here, he first distinguishes between different kinds of souls: the everyday souls (*Alltagsseele*) and the Sunday souls (*Sonntagsseele*):

Dear comrades; there are everyday souls and Sunday souls. The everyday soul never gets beyond the dusty country road of everyday life. The Sunday soul has wings and rises again and again to bright, clear heights! Even the common man can do his duty, day after day, in the same way, but he quickly becomes dull and embittered. But whoever carries the Sunday spirit within him keeps bright eyes for the beauty and majesty of the world of God, keeps cheerful in the daily burden and plague, retains enthusiasm for the great earthly and eternal things. And when a new ray of divine beauty falls upon his eyes, and when indestructible peace fills him, and when enthusiasm and high goals move him to the depths of his soul, then it is Sunday in him, then he is in that which is his Father.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Edmund G. C. King, 'E. W. Hornung's unpublished "diary", the YMCA, and the reading soldier in the First World War', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* lvii/3 (2014), 361-87 at p. 364.

⁴⁸ See also Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, 183.

⁴⁹ 'Liebe Kameraden; es gibt Alltagsseeelen und Sonntagsseeelen. Die Alltagsseele kommt nie ueber die staubige Landstrasse des taeglichen Lebens hinaus. Die Sonntagsseele hat Fluegel und erhebt sich wieder und wieder in lichte klare Hoehen! Auch der Alltagsmensch kann seine Pflicht tun, Tag fuer Tag den gleichen Gang, aber er wird schnell stumpf und verbittert. Wer aber sonntaeglichen Geist in sich traegt, der bewahrt sich helle Augen fuer die Schoenheit und Erhabenheit der Welt Gottes, der bewahrt sich Froehlichkeit in der taeglichen Last und Plage, der bewahrt sich Begeisterung fuer die grossen irdigen und ewigen Dinge. Und wenn ein neuer Strahl der goettlichen Schoenheit in sein Auge faellt, und wenn unzerstoerbarer Friede ihn erfuellt, und wenn Begeisterung und hohe Ziele ihn bewegen bis in die Tiefen der Seele, dann ist es Sonntag in ihm, dann ist er in dem, was seines

Thus, according to Tillich, even in suffering, and through everyday life, the Sunday soul finds comfort in God. The very depths of the human soul are moved by the 'Sunday' in it, he states. The soul plays such an important role for Tillich that it is the very soul which speaks to the human being saying, 'I must be in what is my Father's, on the Lord's day, all life and in eternity!'⁵⁰ This feeling is indispensable in the hard times of war.⁵¹ Here again is the idea, from the prewar sermons, that the soul is the active part of the human being in times of suffering. And this is further developed into the Sunday soul, active amidst suffering, juxtaposed to the everyday soul, which is dulled and embittered.

Tillich did not merely preach about the Sunday soul amid suffering in general. He also preached about the Sunday soul in the context of war, whether this fight is the next battle or future battles: this is irrelevant for it 'makes no difference before eternity'.⁵² He even believed the Sunday soul to be even more important in wartime, as wartime knows no holidays.⁵³ Tillich therefore introduces a variation on the Sunday soul, the hero soul (*Heldenseele*). The hero soul has 'a Sunday glow, a shine of eternity, a light from the Father's house' over it.⁵⁴ And this hero soul will be needed, as 'a lot of heroism, a lot of overcoming death is required of you in these and the coming days!'⁵⁵

What does such heroism entail? What does it mean to overcome death? The answer can be found in a wartime sermon on Philippians ii. Here, Tillich has an entire section titled 'Dying is my gain'⁵⁶ which takes up one-third of the short sermon. Tillich states that:

Dying is my gain. It is so hard for us to get accustomed to this thought. All of us, the pious and the godless, regard dying as a loss; but that is untrue; even life can be a loss; a life of dishonour, of cowardice, of selfishness, of primal unity, that is a loss of

Vaters ist': Tillich, sermon on Luke ii.49 [Welkierspödigten], handwritten, in German, n.d., PTP, 1894-1974, HDS, bMS 649/31 (44), 3; *GW*vii. 531-4.

⁵⁰ 'Ich sein muss in dem, was meines Vaters ist, am Tage des Herrn, das ganze Leben und in der Ewigkeit!': Tillich, sermon on Luke ii.49 [Welkierspödigten], handwritten, in German, n.d., PTP, 1894-1974, HDS, bMS 649/31 (44), 1.

⁵¹ 'Unentbehrlich, das fühlen wir jetzt so recht, wo wir ihn fast immer entbehren müssen in dem harten Kinerlei des Krieglebens, das keines Feiertag kennt!': *ibid.*

⁵² 'das ist kein Unterschied vor der Ewigkeit. Einst müssen wir sein in unseres Vaters Haus' ('It is no difference before eternity. One day we will be in our Father's house'): *ibid.* 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 2-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 5.

⁵⁵ 'Viel Heldentum, viel Todesüberwindung wird von Euch verlangt in diesen und den kommenden Tagen!': *ibid.* 4-5.

⁵⁶ 'Sterben ist mein Gewinn': Tillich, untitled sermon on Phil. ii [Welkierspödigten], handwritten, in German, n.d., PTP, 1894-1974, HDS, bMS 649/30 (52), 1 (Tillich's emphasis).

eternity. But a death in heroism, in the service of love, that is gain, gain of eternity.⁵⁷

Here, Tillich juxtaposes living with a loss of eternity with dying while gaining eternity.⁵⁸ This is what heroism is for Tillich: to die for eternity in the service of love. This idealisation of self-sacrifice was a common motivational motif during World War I. In their study of the German war effort, Alexander Watson and Patrick Porter contend that this ideology contributed to the mass slaughter of the war and even exacerbated the violence. Such rhetoric encouraged the soldiers to endure and seek vengeance as an act of vindication for their dead.⁵⁹ The suffering of the war, in turn, contributed to this ideology of sacrifice, as the intense physical suffering, rather than disillusioning the soldiers, imbued sacrifice with greater meaning.⁶⁰ And the soldiers were far from disillusioned about death – death was far from just an abstract concept for them; it was a very present experience. The notion of death for the German soldiers at the front was an event which was witnessed violently, in forms of extreme brutality, and repeatedly.⁶¹

These existential experiences of suffering and death at the front transformed Tillich's understanding of eternity and the soul: the soul is to sacrifice itself, and through this sacrifice it will gain eternity. In Tillich's sermons, the intense suffering of the war imbued sacrifice with greater meaning when related to eternity and the soul. In his sermon on Phil. ii, dying is not only gain for eternity, but for the Fatherland – a concept directly related to the ideology of sacrifice⁶² – as Tillich states later in this sermon.⁶³ He furthermore, refers to this as dying in heroism and dying

⁵⁷ 'Sterben ist mein Gewinn. Wir koennen uns an diesen Gedanken so schwer gewoehnen. Wir fassen alle, Fromme und Gottlose, das Sterben als Verlust auf; aber das ist unwahr; auch das Leben kann Verlust sein; ein Leben in Unehre, in Feigkeit, in Selbstsucht, in Ureinheit, das ist Verlust der Ewigkeit. Aber ein Sterben in Heldentum, im Dienst der Liebe, das ist Gewinn, Gewinn der Ewigkeit': *ibid.* (Tillich's emphasis).

⁵⁸ This is not dissimilar to when he preached on temporal and inner death in the early parish sermon on Ps. li: see n. 11 above.

⁵⁹ Alexander Watson and Patrick Porter, 'Bereaved and aggrieved: combat motivation and the ideology of sacrifice in the First World War', *Historical Research* lxxxiii (2010), 146–64 at p. 146. Furthermore, Watson and Porter believe (pp. 156–9) this ideology to have remained strongest among the group to whom the ideology had already been closely wedded before 1914, namely classically educated, pious, middle-class men. It is not difficult to count Tillich among this group. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 156.

⁶¹ Duménil, 'Soldiers' suffering', 47. With reference to Louis Crogq, Duménil refers to this as a primordial traumatic factor. For his study of what he refers to as the Churches' problem of basic theodicy see also Porter, 'New Jerusalem', 104–7.

⁶² Watson and Porter, 'Bereaved and aggrieved', 147.

⁶³ Tillich, untitled sermon on Phil. ii [Welkiergspredigten], handwritten, in German, n.d., PTP, 1894–1974, HDS, bMs 649/30 (52), 1.

in the service of love.⁶⁴ Thus, the hero soul does not merely fight for eternity, but for the Fatherland in the service of others too. And through this, dying seen as a loss is overcome. The emphasis on eternity, on its spiritual significance and on the Fatherland was not unfamiliar in the sermons of the first two years of the war delivered by German Protestant clergy. Following Mark R. Correll, a common thread in these sermons was the emphasis on the war being part of God's plan for the world, as well as for the German nation, giving to it a cosmic, eternal importance – something reflected in Tillich's belief that the hero soul's sacrifice is gain for both eternity and for Germany.⁶⁵ As Correll writes, 'it was a war fought as much with weapons of faith and prayer as with machine guns and biplanes'.⁶⁶

In such a war, strength is needed. Tillich comments on the need for strength in a wartime sermon, dated 24 January 1915, on Ps. lxii.2. Here, Tillich further develops the stillness of the soul which was expressed in his early (1903) parish sermon on Heb. i.9–11. In the war sermon, Tillich asks his listeners to think back to 'the past few days as you walked through a valley of death'.⁶⁷ Looking back on the past and forward to the coming days, Tillich encourages his listeners to become still. Only by being still can they remain strong and conquer. Restlessness makes one weak.⁶⁸

How does one's soul become still? Much like 'the eternal calm in the middle of time' from Tillich's early parish sermon on Heb. i.9–11, the answer is eternity. There is always quietness wherever eternity appears in time, as 'the eternal stillness of God sinks into the restlessness of temporality'.⁶⁹ The soul is still before God who helps the human being.⁷⁰ Eternity can be felt in the soul, as Tillich emphasises in his New Year's sermon (1914/15) on Luke xxiv.29. Here, he encourages his listeners to look back on the past year. Some worried about the future, some hoped the coming year would bring them joy, and yet some were 'in quiet gathering

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ M. R. Correll, *Shepherds of the empire: Germany's conservative Protestant leadership, 1888–1919*, Minneapolis, MN 2014, 223–4. With this rhetoric celebrating the German nation being used, one should not be blind to the racism found in the ranks of the German troops: M. Moyd, 'A uniform of whiteness: racisms in the German officer corps, 1900–1918', in J. MacLeod and P. Purseigle (eds), *Uncovered fields: perspectives in First World War studies*, Leiden 2003, 25–42, and L. M. Todd, 'The enemy lurking behind the front: controlling sex in the German forces sent to eastern and western Europe, 1914–1918', in A. Beyerchen and E. Sencer (eds), *Expeditionary forces in the First World War*, Cham 2019, 79–110.

⁶⁶ Correll, *Shepherds*, 224.
⁶⁷ 'Wir Denken der vergangenen Tage, wie Ihr durch ein Tal des Todes gegangen seid': Tillich, sermon on Ps. lxii.2 [Welkiergspredigten], handwritten, in German, n.d., PTP, 1894–1974, HDS, bMS 649/30 (13), 1.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 2.
⁶⁹ 'die ewige Gottesstille sich senkt in die Unruhe der Zeitlichkeit': ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 3.

before God, feeling the breath of transience in the passing of a year and also the eternal for their soul'.⁷¹ The soul becomes still when it is conscious of eternity.

In another of Tillich's wartime sermons, on John xxi.7, he sheds some light on how one might experience the eternal in the soul. Here again, the interpretative key is the experience of suffering in the war.⁷² In a section on the 'conquerors who lie before us',⁷³ i.e. the heroic fallen soldiers, Tillich describes how the 'the first glow of eternity in a human soul'⁷⁴ is the human being going beyond itself and its ego, happiness, comfort, honour, even its own life. Here, according to Tillich, is to be found the beginning of all true humanity and all true Christianity. And it is the first source of inner strength, of inner worth and of the eternal in the soul. And once again, this is related to the Fatherland, as the human being in this act gives their life to the Fatherland.⁷⁵ By overcoming oneself, one overcomes, for example, suffering and death, and through this victory, one helps one's comrades, platoons and companies as well as the entire Fatherland.⁷⁶ Thus, the suffering and death of the war are described as the glow of eternity in the soul. The themes of eternity and the soul are once again understood in light of the devastating and often fatal suffering of war.

Just as overcoming oneself is used by Tillich in his wartime sermons to define true humanity, so is pastoral care (*Seeesorge*).⁷⁷ One example is a sermon on Matthew vi.25–34, where pastoral care is described as the highest and most important form of care and that which distinguishes the human being from others.⁷⁸ It is through caring that 'we take part in God's rule and his eternity', Tillich states.⁷⁹ Suffering is once again used as an interpretive key, as it is juxtaposed with the correct care.

⁷¹ 'in stiller Sammlung vor Gott, im Vergehen eines Jahres den Hauch der Vergaenglichkeit spuerend und das Ewige auchend fuer ihre Seele': Tillich, sermon on Luke xxiv.29 [Welkiergspredigten], handwritten, in German, n.d., PTP, 1894–1974, HDS, bMS 649/31 (14), 1; *GW*vii. 372–5.

⁷² Tillich is aware that suffering, especially such immense suffering as that experienced in war, can make it hard to understand God. See, for example, PTA, AHBPU, 038 A/63; *GW*vii. 541–4.

⁷³ 'What gives us a right to call those, who lie before us, conquerors?' ('Was gibt uns ein Recht, sie Ueberwinder zu nennen, die hier vor uns liegen?'): Tillich, fragment of an undated, untitled sermon on John xxi.7, PTA, AHBPU, 038 A/7, 1.

⁷⁴ 'das erste Leuchten der Ewigkeit in einer Menschenseele': *ibid.* 2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 1–2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 2.

⁷⁷ A literal translation of *Seeesorge* would be 'soul care'.

⁷⁸ Tillich, untitled sermon on Matt. vi.25–34 [Welkiergspredigten], handwritten, in German, n.d., PTP, 1894–1974, HDS, bMS 649/31 (8), 1; *GW*, vii. 583–7.

⁷⁹ 'wir teil an Gottes Walten und seiner Ewigkeit': Tillich, untitled sermon on Matt. vi.25–34 [Welkiergspredigten], handwritten, in German, n.d., PTP, 1894–1974, HDS, bMS 649/31 (8), 2.

Correct care is an action which makes the human being strong, proud and free while suffering, in turn, enslaves the human being, humiliates it and makes it weak.⁸⁰

Tillich was not the only German military chaplain to stress the importance of pastoral care. As evidenced by Takken, Johannes Gersbach lectured on this very subject after returning from the war. Gersbach, however, saw the role of military chaplains to be pastoral care and teaching soldiers to die well.⁸¹ Tillich, on the other hand, stated in his sermon on Matt vi.25–34 that human beings – not just chaplains – had to take part in pastoral care. One has to take part in the pastoral care of oneself. There is, according to Tillich, only one person who can take care of the human being's soul, and that is that human being himself. As Tillich states in this sermon, 'your soul is in your hands!'⁸² By caring for one's own soul, one furthermore cares for eternity. And therefore, one is, according to Tillich, blessed: 'Blessed is he who cares about his soul and does not let it rest for his entire life! He does not care about time, he cares about eternity!'⁸³ Eternity and the soul are again interwoven by Tillich; the human being must care for its own soul in order to care for eternity – even amidst suffering, during which Tillich believed the soul to be active as the whole human being.

The importance of sermons as the immanent way of theology during the war

One of Tillich's early lectures offers some insight into why eternity and the soul became more important in Tillich's sermons during the war. In the lecture 'The two ways in which systematic theology is possible today' ('Die beiden Wege der systematischen Theologie, die heute möglich sind'), Tillich describes exactly why sermons are important. Sermons are the immanent way in which systematic theology is possible, while philosophy and existence, and thus the analysis of being, is the transcendent way.⁸⁴ Describing the immanent way, the first thing Tillich notices is

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Takken, *Churches*, 175.

⁸² 'in deiner Hand liegt deine Seele!': Tillich, 'Untitled sermon on Matt. vi. 25–34' [Welkiergspredigten], handwritten, in German, n.d., PTP, HDS, 1894–1974. bMs 649/3¹ (8), 4.

⁸³ 'Wohl dem, den die Sorge um seine Seele nicht ruhen laesst sein Lebenlang! Er sorgt nicht fuer die Zeit, er sorgt fuer seine Ewigkeit!': *ibid.*

⁸⁴ More precisely, Tillich refers to the two ways as 'The way of self-determination of the sermon (The immanent way)' ('Der Weg der Selbstbestimmung der Predigt [Der immanente Weg]') and 'The way of philosophy as a concrete reason for existence (The transcendent way)' ('Der Weg der Philosophie als konkrete Daseinsbegründung [Der transzendente Weg]'): lecture notes, 'Die beiden Wege der systematischen Theologie, die heute möglich sind', PTP, 1894–1974, HDS, bMs 649/14 (4), 1. While this lecture is not dated, the archival records note that it was given before 1933.

that the self of the sermon is identical to the self of theology. This results in Tillich believing that the content of the sermon characterises the development of a concrete situation.⁸⁵ He emphasises that the concepts used in sermons 'must remain in the sphere of the world of concepts foretold by sermons',⁸⁶ which he refers to as a 'strict immanence of concept formation'.⁸⁷ Such concepts would be, among others, eternity and the soul. The concepts of the sermon thus imply a concrete understanding of the world that is taken along the path of immanence. The concepts must not, according to Tillich, point beyond, but must be supported by a religious impulse that can be understood in the sermon itself.⁸⁸ There are several dated war reports in the archives which can shed some light on the context in which the strict immanence of concept formation took place amidst the suffering of the war.⁸⁹

Tillich's report of 3 November 1914 illustrates how he looked at what he called the unveiled view of the eternal in moments of danger and suffering. Here, he depicts the two forms of sermons: the motivational and the contemplative. Tillich describes how he employs the motivational form of sermon when preaching to troops (permanent or temporary) behind the lines, and the contemplative form when preaching to front-line troops. Tillich justifies his choice: 'in the case of troops at the front, who are constantly in a state of great inner excitement and in grave danger, I have emphasised quietness. In the case of the troops behind the lines, who easily get the hang of the situation and can settle down in a bad way, I have put motives first'.⁹⁰ Thus, Tillich uses a mystical comforting tone when preaching to front-line troops but uses the language of inner, moral struggle when preaching behind the lines. Furthermore, he aims to balance stillness and activity: this is seen in sermons on the soul which is both said to rest and be still and to be active and heroic amidst suffering.

Tillich believed that the activity of chaplains was often urgently desired in wartime, but rarely in times of peace. Now, in time of war, it is something which supports and strengthens.⁹¹ The war was seen by the German clergy

⁸⁵ 'Die beiden Wege der systematischen Theologie, die heute möglich sind': *ibid.*

⁸⁶ 'müssen bleiben in der Sphäre der durch Predigt vorgespähten Begriffeswelt': *ibid.*

⁸⁷ 'Strenge Immanenz der Begriffsbildung': *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 1–2.

⁸⁹ The available reports can be analysed chronologically as they have specific dates, while the war sermons are mostly undated and are therefore analysed thematically. However, I was unable to find any war reports from Tillich that cover dates later than November and December 1915.

⁹⁰ 'Bei der Frontruppen, die dauernd in starker innerer Erregung und in schwerer Gefahr sind, habe ich die Quietion betont. Bei den Truppen hinter der Front, die leicht dazu kommen, den Erhst der Lage zu bergessen und sich im schlechten Sinne einzuleben, habe ich die Motive vorangestellt': Tillich report, 'Bericht an den Hern Feldpropst der Armee zu Händen des Herrn Oberpfarrers des IV. Armeekorps Herrn Konsistorialrat Schlegel, 3 November 1914', PTA, AHBPU, 038 A/7, 6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 7.

as an opportunity and a second chance for those who had forgotten God; now they could find God again. Correll believes that the clergy saw a spiritual importance in the war which went beyond any political success ‘each time a soldier on the front cried out to God in the heat of battle and as each parent prayed for a son’s safety on the battlefield’.⁹²

In his report on May and June 1915, Tillich follows up on his distinction between the two different forms of sermons expressed in his report of 3 November 1914. This report is somewhat more grim. Tillich states that ‘the sermon has to struggle with the tangible limitation of material, especially since the church year has not been of any help since Pentecost; there is nothing left to broaden the field of vision from the world of war to thoughts of the future form and liveliness of religious life’.⁹³ Tillich therefore found that providing motivation and quietness – which he now referred to as the task of the field sermon in accordance with his previous report – remained the most important task.⁹⁴ But he also found it necessary to expand upon it so that it may also hint at a future after the war. He saw hope for the future as an essential element of these sermons, along with motivation and quietness. Through this hope, which is described as the living force of the soul, the power of immanence remains unbroken in the revelation of the eternal. Thus, eternity and the soul, themes that received a fuller development in Tillich’s theology when he had experienced the suffering and devastation of the war, are understood as important pastoral elements. These, in turn, gain their importance through the immanent way of theology.

The distinction between the immanent and the transcendent way of theology is also to be found in a report from November and December 1915. Here, Tillich does not only describe this distinction but also relates it to the soul. The living force of the soul is here stated as the hope for peace. And this hope is described as the only thing left, not merely as an isolated utterance, but as the keynote.⁹⁵ And through this hope, ‘the power of immanence is not broken in any way. Since it cannot work in the form of enjoyment being tied to the world, it works as impatient

⁹² Correll, *Shepherds*, 225. Watson and Porter believe that this motive was of importance for both the soldiers fighting in the war and the people at home: ‘Bereaved and aggrieved’, 159–61. Takken, too, emphasises this aspect and believes that to some German military chaplains ordering soldiers to attend service was akin to saving their souls: *Churches*, 161–2.

⁹³ ‘Die Predigt hat mit der immer fühlbarer werdenden Stoffbegrenzung zu kämpfen, zumal das Kirchenjahr seit Pfingsten nicht mehr zu Hilfe kommt; es bleibt da nichts übrig als eine Erweiterung des Gesichtskreises über die engste Kriegsgedankenwelt im Hinblick auf die künftige Gestaltung und Lebendigkeit des religiösen Lebens’: Tillich report, ‘Bericht über die Monate Mai und Juni 1915’, n.d., PTP, HDS, 1894–1974, bMS 649/218 (17), 9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Idem*, ‘Bericht über die Monate November und Dezember 1915’, n.d., *ibid.* 1.

longing'.⁹⁶ The longing of the soul, described by Tillich in several of his wartime sermons, is tied together with the power of immanence.

Both immanence and transcendence are referred to in this report with regard to Christmas and the New Year of 1915/16. Tillich states that a storm of immanence was poured into the Christmas party but was inhibited by the burden of the present. However, some few people could understand the transcendent meaning of the Gospel, which is why there was something liberating in the New Year. 'It is', as Tillich writes, 'only slightly burdened with melancholic moments of danger, and one could look with an unveiled view at the eternal that so majestically has revealed itself over time and human life.'⁹⁷ In his 1914/15 New Year's sermons on Luke xxiv.29 Tillich emphasised how eternity can be felt in the soul; with this report from the New Year 1915/16 we can now add that the eternal reveals itself over the course of time and amid suffering.

The study of the themes of eternity and the soul in Tillich's prewar sermons showed that they rarely occurred, and where they did it was in relation to concern/care, death and suffering. When Tillich found himself amidst the tremendous suffering of World War I, however, these two themes became the major focus of most of his sermons. His sermons concentrated on the eternal in the soul, on Sunday souls, on hero souls, on the care for one's soul and thus for eternity. All of these themes were interpreted in light of Tillich's experiences of suffering. As a result, Tillich's theology developed a fuller understanding of the themes of eternity and the soul, as is seen in the World War I sermons. By using the suffering of war as an interpretive key, Tillich was able to uphold his own criteria for theology after World War I: to be meaningful any theology must address the question of suffering. The use and development of the themes of eternity and the soul became Tillich's way of addressing both his own and his audience's experience of the war and their experience of suffering. As evidenced in a letter from Tillich to his father of 23 November 1916, it was precisely for eternity that Tillich fought and preached: 'I preach about the text: we have no permanent place here – what are we supposed to do here, when everything leaves us! But I cling tighter than ever to the future. I will, I preach, I fight for eternity.'⁹⁸

⁹⁶ 'Die Macht der Immanenz ist in keiner Weise gebrochen. Da sie nicht in Form genießender Weltgebundenheit wirken kann, so wirkt sie als ungeduldige Sehnsucht': *ibid.*

⁹⁷ 'Es ist nur wenig mit wehmütig stimmenden Gefahrenmomenten belastet und man konnte mit unverschleiertem Blick auf das Ewige blicken, das so majestätisch über Zeit und Menschenleben sich offenbart hat': *ibid.*

⁹⁸ 'Ich predige über den Text: wir haben hier keine bleibende Statt – was sollen wir auch hier, wenn alles von uns geht! Aber ich klammere mich fester denn je an die zukünftige. Ich will, ich predige, ich kämpfe für die Ewigkeit': Tillich letter, 23 Nov. 1916, PTA, AHBPU, 008 A/5, 1.