

Protestant Existentialists on the Distortion of Faith

UDC: 141.32

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15421/1724119>**Dankanich Artem**Ph.D., Assoc. Prof., <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0824-1936>, artem_dankanich@yahoo.com*Oles Honchar Dnipro National University (Dnipro, Ukraine)*

Abstract

Relevance. The question of the distortion of faith has long been a concern for religious thinkers. Among the most insightful analyses were those offered by representatives of Protestant existentialism, including Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, and Rudolf Bultmann.

The Purpose. The study aims to explore the concept of “Distortion of Faith” as interpreted by prominent 20th-century Protestant thinkers: Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, and Rudolf Bultmann.

Results. The concept of faith has a long history of interpretation in both religious (theological) and philosophical contexts. In a biblical sense, faith is understood as adherence to true doctrine and as a specific existential state. Therefore, a departure from faith is seen as heresy, schism, or apostasy. The theological classification of faith includes three main elements: intellectual, emotional, and volitional. In contrast, the philosophical interpretation of faith is characterized by dynamism and openness, while the religious perspective tends to be more dogmatic. In the works of Protestant existentialists, one can observe a reevaluation of the implications of the distortion of faith. Paul Tillich identifies three types of faith distortions: intellectual, moral, and emotional. Karl Barth argues that religion itself is a form of faith distortion, as it replaces the transcendent essence of faith with anthropocentric practices of piety. Similarly, Rudolf Bultmann asserts that the distortion of faith is manifest in a reliance on myth, particularly in its eschatological and cosmological aspects.

Conclusions. Thus, Protestant existentialism rethought not only the essence of faith but also the forms of its distortion. The ultimate goal of Protestant existentialism was to articulate the meaning of authentic faith, liberated from the religious overlays that had muddled its understanding for centuries.

Keywords: faith, distortion of faith, Protestant existentialism, philosophy, religion, interpretation, anthropological cognition of faith

Протестантські екзистенціалісти про спотворення віри

Данканіч Артем*Дніпровський національний університет імені Олеся Гончара (Дніпро, Україна)*

Анотація

Актуальність. Проблема спотворення віри завжди залишалася в центрі уваги релігійних мислителів, а одну з її найбільш проникливих спроб осмислення здійснили представники протестантського екзистенціалізму – Пауль Тілліх, Карл Барт і Рудольф Бультманн.

Метою дослідження є ознайомлення з поняттям “Спотворення віри” в інтерпретації провідних протестантських мислителів 20-го століття – Пауля Тілліха, Карла Барта і Рудольфа Бультманна.

Результати. Поняття віри має тривалу історію інтерпретації, як в релігійних (теологічних) колах, так і в філософських. В біблійному сенсі віра розуміється як слідування істинному вченню, а також як особливий екзистенційний стан. Відповідно відхід від віри розуміється як ересь, розкол, відступництво. В теологічній класифікації віра має три елементи: інтелектуальний, емоційний, вольовий. Філософська інтерпретація віри вирізняється динамізмом і відкритістю, в той час коли для релігійної характерний догматизм. В роботах протестантських екзистенціалістів простежується переоцінка сенсу спотворення віри. Після зустрічі з американським протестантизмом, Тілліх дійшов до висновку, що в його основі лежить антропологічне розуміння віри. Унаслідок Тілліх виділяє інтелектуальне, моральне, емоційне спотворення віри. Для Карла Барта релігія – це форма спотворення віри. Вона замінює її трансцендентну сутність на антропологічні практики благочестя. Згідно Рудольфу Бультманну, спотворення віри знаменується слідуванням міфу в його есхатологічно-космологічному вимірі.

Висновки. Таким чином, в протестантському екзистенціалізмі відбулося переосмислення не тільки сутності віри, але й форм її спотворення. Кінцевою ж метою протестантських екзистенціалістів було окреслення сенсу автентичної віри, вільної від релігійних напластувань, що спотворювали її протягом століть.

Ключові слова: віра, спотворення віри, протестантський екзистенціалізм, філософія, релігія, інтерпретація, антропологічне розуміння віри

Стаття надійшла / Article arrived: 29.10.2024

Схвалено до друку / Accepted: 26.12.2024

Introduction.

To many religious people, the concept distortion of faith is used as a term that represents the negative side of spiritual life, with a clear reference to heresy, apostasy, schism, cult, and sectarianism. More specifically, the word "distortion" within religious context marks the way of deception, false teaching, spiritual blindness, and abandon true faith.

When the word distortion is used in the Bible, it means that someone is led astray by a false religion. The Old Testament warns against disobeying God's commandments and instructions by following other gods (Deuteronomy 11:28, 13:2, 28:14, etc.). Also, this line is found in the New Testament, when the apostles anathematize false teaching (1 John 4:2), and the false prophets who introduce destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1). These biblical claims, of course, are both critical and assertive. It is sharply vital because the Scripture portrays the distortion of the faith as a sin. It is assertive because it implies the idea that faith in itself is insufficient.

Furthermore, man must confess the genuine doctrine. The term faith in this context is generally understood as a belief in sound teaching. Deeper still, the practice of this pure faith is crucial for obtaining salvation. Given the exalted place of the faith in the theistic religions, then the question arises, whence its distortion? As mentioned above, the distortion of faith is closely related to the concept of heresy. From this perspective, heresy is to be considered a threat to the church. This approach can be characterized as a theological one because its starting point stems from a doctrinal perspective. There is, however, another viewpoint on the distortion of faith, presented by acclaimed protestant thinkers of the twentieth century – Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Unlike the majority of apologists and theologians, they introduced some new perspectives on distortion in the religious context. Along with this change of paradigm regarding the distortion of faith, we can also detect a certain shift in Christian intellectual circles concerning the very meaning of faith.

For example, in many instances, particularly in the early 1920s Karl Barth's "Der Römerbrief" challenged previous perspectives (Ancient Orthodox and Modern Liberal) on the nature of faith, calling for a revolution in Christian consciousness. Given that fact, the question arises: what might this shift mean for the Christianity of the 20th century? Another important issue here is the following: what, then, is the distortion of faith? Taking this question as a basis, we attempt to clarify the term "Distortion of Faith" by appealing primarily to the acclaimed protestant thinkers of the twentieth century – Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The purpose. It is our aim here to survey the interpretations of leading protestant thinkers of the 20th century regarding the notion of distortion of faith and to approach them from a historico-philosophical

perspective. Given that Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Tillich did not create a systematic doctrine of faith, we will need to search for and discover it in their various scattered writings. This approach necessitates the use of the hermeneutic method and the principle of correlation, respectively.

Analysis of previous research and publications.

The theme of the distortion of faith has been explored in recent monographs by Emerson and Glaney (2024), Lawrence (2024), and Vicari (2014). A close reading of these works reveals that American authors have diverse experiences regarding the distortion of faith. Emerson and Glaney (2024) suggest that this distortion is closely related to what they describe as the "Religion of Whiteness" (p. 14). In contrast, Lawrence identifies "eight ways we have reduced the weight of Jesus' true presence" (p. 7). Vicari argues that the distortion of faith parallels "distortions of the gospel," which, in recent decades, have manifested in preaching centered on themes of equality, diversity, and tolerance (p. 2). It is essential to note that these authors are driven by theological and apologetic motives, which can lead them to overlook a fundamental principle of research: the importance of a value-free orientation. Additionally, their findings are methodologically flawed, as their perspectives on the distortion of faith stem from a narrow context – primarily within American Protestant circles.

Another group of researchers focuses on the field of Christian existentialism, including the works of Casewell (2022), Woodson (2020), Macquarrie (1965; 1973) and Cochrane (1956). It is important to note that, while they outline the general direction of Christian existentialism, they rarely address its Protestant version in detail. Furthermore, they do not acknowledge the issue of the distortion of faith, either directly or indirectly. Thus the topic "distortion of faith" seems to be poorly explored.

Results.

Before evaluating claims about distortion of faith, it is necessary to review the basic descriptions about its nature. Here we appeal predominantly to theological and philosophical interpretations made by acclaimed thinkers. Since the concept of faith is important to us, it is essential to define its biblical descriptions clearly. According to the Scripture, "faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Holy Bible, 1984, p. 685). In other words, biblical faith is intended to be a very specific personal and existential experience. Also, we should not lose sight of the intellectual element of the faith, found in numerous biblical passages. Here we appeal to the apostle Paul and his "Epistle to Romans", where he affirms, "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Holy Bible, 1984, p. 646).

Another intellectual element of the faith is indirectly emphasized in chapter 14: "Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters" (Holy Bible, 1984, p. 648). It is important to keep in mind

that Paul and the early Christians considered faith as something half-existential and half-intellectual. There is no pure rational depiction of faith in the Pauline literature, despite the fact his epistles are filled with theoretical passages. Before we proceed further, it's important to note that the term "Distortion of Faith" is not present in the Bible. This is partly because the Scriptures, especially the New Testament, uses the term "heresy" (2 Peter 2:1) to articulate a similar concern.

The noted theologian Alister McGrath comments on the term "heresy", explaining that it is best understood as a form of Christian belief that, more by accident than design, ultimately ends up subverting, destabilizing, or even destroying its core. Additionally, the process of destabilization and the identification of its threat may occur over an extended period (McGrath, 2009, p. 18). According to McGrath, heresy represents certain ways of formulating the core themes of the Christian faith – ways that are sooner or later recognized by the church as dangerously inadequate or even destructive. It is important to note that McGrath uses the terms "heresy" and "the distortion of faith" interchangeably (McGrath, 2009, p. 30). Following Schleiermacher, McGrath argues that heresy is anything that contradicts the essential identity of Christianity, even though it retains the formal outward appearance of Christianity. Heresy is therefore to be thought of as a deficient form of Christian belief that preserves the appearance of Christianity while contradicting its essence. This immediately locates the sphere of heresy as lying within, not outside, the church (McGrath, 2009, p. 90). McGrath has suggested, however, that Schleiermacher tends to treat heresy as a purely intellectual phenomenon and fails to take account of its social and historical aspects.

Prominent Catholic thinker Dr. Lawrence Feingold in his "Faith Comes from What Is Heard" explains the concept of heresy in the following way: "Heresy is a particular kind of disbelief by which someone who believes in Christ obstinately rejects the authority of the Church to define doctrine and corrupts or denies some truths of faith" (Feinhold, 2009, p. 55).

Also, Feinhold adds a helpful insight when he notes that the heretic is a human being who chooses and obstinately holds the pillars of the faith according to his own will and reason, affording them credibility above the Church. Feinhold emphasizes that the etymology of the word heresy comes from the Greek for to elect or choose. Thus, every heresy involves choosing the faith according to one's own personal (or group) criteria (Feinhold, 2009, p. 55).

The most comprehensive and accurate description of faith is presented in Henry Clarence Thiessen's classic "Lectures in Systematic Theology". In examining the term "Faith," Thiessen distinguishes three different (though related) concepts: "Belief", "Hope", "the Faith", and "Faith". Belief, argues Thiessen, is the intellectual element of faith. Regarding hope, he points out its affiliation

exclusively with the future. Hope consists of desire, expectation, assurance, and the elements of knowledge. As to «the Faith», it is the totality of Christian doctrine as contained in the Gospels and Epistles (Luke 18:8; Acts 6:7; 1 Tim. 4:1; 6:10; Jude 3). The last element called "Faith" is portrayed in the New Testament as "Trust".

Despite the above definitions, Thiessen goes on to classify the different aspects of Faith as follows:

1. The intellectual element contains belief in Revelation, the historical facts of Scripture, and the doctrines taught regarding anthropology, soteriology, and eschatology. According to Thiessen, this element of faith is greatly disparaged at the present time, however it is fundamental to the other constituents of faith (Thiessen, 1949, p. 271);

2. The emotional element intimates a partial and temporary acceptance of the truth of God, as distinguished from a complete appropriation of its message (Thiessen, 1949, p. 272);

3. The voluntary element is the logical outgrowth of the intellectual and the emotional. The voluntary element is so comprehensive that it presupposes that no one can be saved who does not voluntarily appropriate Christ. According to Thiessen, this element implies a change of will, disposition, and purpose. Therefore, this is the inward turning from sin (Thiessen, 1949, p. 272).

Within this theological dimension of faith, we will discuss its distortions as being portrayed within protestant existentialism subsequently. So far, we have looked at Faith from a purely theological perspective. However, there is another significant aspect of this discussion: the philosophical appraisal of faith. We will devote the latter part of the survey to examining the philosophical image of faith introduced by the great thinkers of the twentieth century Anthony Kenny and Karl Jaspers.

The noted British philosopher Anthony Kenny contends that faith is a threefold construct: First of all, faith is a belief in something as revealed by God. Second, it is the belief in a proposition from the word of God. Third, faith is a correlate of revelation. Commenting on the third pillar of the faith, Anthony Kenny attempts to explain it as follows: "for faith to be possible it must be possible to identify something as the word of God" (Kenny, 1992, p. 47).

Coming to the question of revelation, Kenny says it is important to examine its relation to faith. If the revelation is ultimately tied up with faith, it is important to explain how both elements can be interrelated. Kenny claims there are numerous different forms and channels through which the revelation came: through Christ, through Moses or the prophets, through the Bible and the Church, or "even in an enlightenment of the individual conscience" (Kenny, 1992, p. 48). According to Kenny, in common to all these different cases is that the believer's faith is belief in certain propositions as having been miraculously revealed by God. In this sense faith in God's revelation was considered as prior to human reason, permitting it

access to truths which would otherwise be beyond its reach (Kenny, 1992, p. 48).

Furthermore, Kenny assumes that there is a set of properties common to everything that has usually been called "faith" in the history of European theological and philosophical tradition. He lists them as:

1. Intellectual (articulation in language);
2. Opaque (incapable of being seen to be true by any intellectual process);
3. Rational (ascertainable data that provide good reasons for believing);
4. Free (optional: pain of damnation versus free choice);
5. Gratuitous (a gift of divine grace);
6. Certain (a commitment without reserve to the articles of faith) (Kenny, 1992, p. 49).

At this point in the survey, it seems fitting to make a comment about Kenny's analysis in his book "What is Faith", that the term "The Distortion of Faith" is not present in the book, largely because Kenny focuses on exploring the relationship between faith and reason.

Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) was one of several philosophers who tried to interpret faith from a philosophical perspective. Extremely erudite, Jaspers made marked contributions to our understanding of the faith, particularly its existential and rational elements, through his acclaimed work, "Der philosophische Glaube angesichts der Offenbarung" (1962). According to Jaspers, "Faith is not a knowledge of something that I have, but the certainty (Gewißheit) that guides me" (Jaspers, 1984, p.49). As noted above, faith is a complex construct, uniting intellectual and psychological dimensions. In considering the basic structure of faith, Jaspers emphasizes this element as well: "The subject and object of faith are one" (Jaspers, 1984, p. 49). Likewise, Jaspers argues, that living by faith and living by faith in something is all that is possible. His point is clearly emphasized in the following passage:

"If I believe, I want to think the content of faith (Glaubensinhalt). However, if I not only want to believe the content of faith but also have it as a possession of knowledge in dogmas and confessions that are available to me, regardless of what I am myself, then it should give me certainty as assurance, without the origin of faith coming from myself. Therefore, failing before transcendence and myself, faithless in the will to believe, in the fear of being dependent on myself, I can believe together with others, supported and secured by community, what we profess as the content of faith. Faith cannot be forced by a thought, nor can it be stated and communicated as mere content. Faith is the strength in which I am certain for the reason that I can maintain but not create". (Jaspers, 1984, p. 49).

In addition to the above properties of faith, Jaspers offers two points:

1. Faith can be called the encompassing, the whole, which is unshakeable, and only shakes when one side,

that of the believing subject alone or that of the believed object alone, is taken for itself.

2. Faith is the ground before all knowledge (Erkenntnis). It becomes clearer in cognition but is never proven (Jaspers, 1984, p. 50).

Interestingly, Jaspers distinguishes two dimensions of faith: philosophical faith (Philosophischer Glaube) and belief in Revelation (Offenbarungsglaube). They both speak of God. However, philosophical faith does not know about God but only hears the language of ciphers. In this interpretation, God is portrayed as a cipher.

In addition to the above differences, Jaspers points out the following:

1. Revelation faith believes that it knows God's actions in revealing himself for the salvation of mankind. According to this description, God works in the world as a special event, binding himself to time and place.

2. On the contrary, Jaspers notes, philosophical faith takes the biblical demand seriously: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or likeness" (Jaspers, 1984, s.196). Jaspers clarifies this point, emphasizing the way of philosophical faith "it constantly seeks to question the manifestations, phenomena and consequences of the belief in revelation with an open eye" (Jaspers, 1984, p. 197).

Anticipating that this claim would provoke a hardline response from theological circles, Jaspers answered them with the following counterargument:

"It would now be wrong to reject the accusation of atheism, nihilism, and whatever other categories church-theological faith uses to label us, with the thesis that God himself is violated by the belief in revelation, which I reject for myself and which seems to me to be a violation of the divinity. God is not to be touched and not to be violated. I would only be guilty of transcendence if I followed the belief in revelation that I cannot understand". (Jaspers, 1984, p. 197).

It is not enough for Jaspers to evaluate faith solely within a philosophical context without also examining religious faith. He does not align with dogmatic assertions regarding the infallibility of religious beliefs, as he views philosophical faith as a critical and open-ended endeavor. For Jaspers, faith is never complete; rather, it is a dynamic process involving thought and self-awareness. This perspective creates a clear distinction between Jaspers and classical Christian thinkers.

Before we begin our survey of faith distortion, it's important to define Protestant existentialism. This movement originated with the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard but gained prominence in the 20th century, particularly within various Protestant denominations. It represents a blend of theology and philosophy, providing a rigorous critique of modernist and historical Christianity. The primary goal of Protestant existentialists is to redefine Christian faith in response to the challenges of the 20th century. Key figures associated with this movement include Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner,

Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Throughout this paper, we will see that thinkers in this branch of existentialism often agree on what constitutes a distortion of faith within Christianity. With these definitions of Protestant existentialism established, we will address one more question before examining the distortion of faith.

What topics are critical to these noted thinkers, who are affiliated with Protestantism by religious experience, cultural identity, and way of thinking? Based on John Maquairre (1965), (1973), Arthur Cochrane (1956), Hue Woodson (2020), and Deborah Casewell (2022), we would detail them as follows: "The Being of God", "the Concept of Existence", "the Meaning of Faith", "Sin", "Nonbeing", "Anxiety", "Facticity", "Falleness", "Temporality", etc. In this article, we will focus our review of the issue of faith distortion on three thinkers: Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, and Rudolf Bultmann.

Paul Tillich effectively defines the distortion of faith, exploring its roots within Christian history in his celebrated book «Dynamics of Faith». This work offers an excellent overview of the three types of faith distortion: intellectualistic, voluntaristic, and emotionalistic.

According to Tillich, intellectualistic distortion is closely related to faith as an act of knowledge. In this interpretation, faith is seen as an appeal to authority – whether religious, scientific, or political. Tillich argues that in all these cases, we encounter neither belief nor genuine faith (Tillich, 1957, p. 31). Tillich clarifies his deduction in the following summary account:

"A person believes that the information available to him is correct. He believes that records of past events can be used to reconstruct facts. He believes that a scientific theory can adequately explain a set of facts. He believes that someone will act in a certain way or that a political situation will change in a certain way. In all these cases, the belief is based on evidence sufficient to make the event seem possible. And here a new element is discovered, namely, trust in authority, which makes any statement probable for us" (Tillich, 1957, p. 31).

However, Tillich emphasizes that believing in authorities is not the same as having faith, although trust does constitute an element of faith (Tillich, 1957, p. 32). For instance, a Christian may believe the biblical authors, but this belief is not unconditional. Contrary to the common perception of faith as mere trust in the highest authority, Tillich argues that faith involves a deep connection with the object of one's interest of one's whole being. Therefore, the term "Faith" should not be used in the context of theoretical knowledge, whether it is grounded in scientific evidence or reliance on authorities. Tillich outlines what precisely constitutes faith:

1. Faith transcends pre-scientific or scientific knowledge about our world;
2. Faith cannot be defined by science, history, or psychology.

Regarding the traditional debate within Christian circles on «faith versus reason», Tillich makes an interesting observation: "The tension between faith and reason is rooted in the incorrect representation of faith as a type of knowledge that is characterized by low certainty and dependence on religious authority". However, Tillich notes that behind the scientific method lie underlying issues of faith, understood as ultimate concern. Thus, faith is opposed to belief, not to knowledge (Tillich, 1957, p. 33).

Additionally, Tillich points out that knowledge of reality never provides certainty based on complete proof. The process of acquiring knowledge is endless; it is never complete. The only exception might be achieving knowledge of the whole. The certainty of faith is «existential», meaning it involves the entirety of human existence. Faith is neither mere belief nor knowledge characterized by low probability. Its certainty is distinct from the uncertain certainty of a theoretical judgment (Tillich, 1957, p. 34-35).

Tillich discusses the voluntaristic distortion of faith, categorizing it into Catholic and Protestant forms (Tillich, 1957, p. 35). The Catholic form is rooted in the ideas of Thomas Aquinas, who argued that the lack of evidence in faith must be compensated for by an act of the will. In contrast, the Protestant form is linked to the moral understanding of religion within the Protestant tradition. According to Paul, this requires "the obedience of faith" (Holy Bible, 1984, p. 641). In this context, the believer often strives to subordinate faith to the will. However, Tillich argues that such an act of will does not genuinely produce faith, as faith itself is superior and precedes the will. Despite its current appeal, the notion that faith is merely a product of human will is fundamentally a misunderstanding. Moreover, neither the command to believe nor the will to believe can create true faith. Our unreliable will cannot generate the certainty that defines genuine faith. Therefore, Tillich contends that justifications, beliefs, and the will to believe cannot create faith (Tillich, 1957, p. 38). While faith does require a certain degree of will, authentic faith transcends it.

We couldn't discuss the distortion of faith without mentioning the emotionalistic perspective described by Tillich in his acclaimed work, "Dynamics of Faith". In this form of distortion, faith is portrayed purely as a subjective emotion, stripped of any content to be understood or requirements to be followed. This interpretation of faith was readily embraced by representatives of science and ethics, as they viewed it as an easy way to eliminate interference from religion in scientific research and technical organization. If religion is merely a feeling, it poses no threat. It is seen as incapable of competing with science, history, psychology, and politics (Tillich, 1957, p. 39). By relegating religion to the realm of subjective feelings, it is no longer considered a danger to human cultural activities. Tillich emphasizes that faith, as an act involving the whole person, contains a significant

emotional element. Emotion reflects the full engagement of a person in an act of life or spirit. However, he argues that emotion is not the source of faith. Instead, faith is directed and is concrete in its content (Tillich, 1957, p. 40).

This survey of faith, as misinterpreted by both Christians and non-Christians, highlights an important point raised by Paul Tillich. He argues that these distortions significantly affect mass consciousness, contributing to a widespread alienation from religion during the predominance of scientific thought. Furthermore, Tillich notes that it is not just mass consciousness that alters the meaning of faith. Philosophy and theology also play a role in this distortion, albeit in a more nuanced manner.

A brief background on Paul Tillich's "Dynamics of Faith" will aid in understanding his analysis of the distortion of faith. This book was originally published during what is known as Tillich's American period, specifically in 1957. After becoming acquainted with American Protestantism, Tillich emerged as one of its most insightful critics. As the following discussion will indicate, American Protestants deviated from the spirit of the Reformation in several ways, particularly in their views of God, grace, and salvation. It is important to understand this assessment in light of his engagement with Protestant circles in America. To clarify this point, we can refer to Tillich's student, Carl E. Braaten, who wrote the foreword to his acclaimed book "History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic Origins to Existentialism".

According to Braaten, a key aspect of Paul Tillich's mission to American Protestantism was to reinterpret the message of the Reformation in contemporary terms. He believed that American Protestantism had barely been influenced by the prophetic messages of Luther and Calvin. In Tillich's view, the fundamental doctrines of the Reformation, which had become stagnant for many of its followers, are, in his treatment, living symbols of a renewed relationship with God – the very force that empowered Luther's reformatory work. Tillich's poignant critiques of the pseudo-orthodoxies, shallow liberalism, and puritanical moralities in American Protestantism stemmed from his deep understanding of Luther's message. He observed that Protestant preaching in America often implies that the grace of God – His attitude toward humanity – depends on an individual's moral seriousness, religious devotion, or genuine beliefs. Although the formula "justification by faith" is still used, Tillich rightly pointed out that faith is frequently transformed into a work that individuals are encouraged to achieve through their own conscious decisions. To counter this Pelagian implication, Tillich suggested that it might be more helpful to say, "justification through faith" rather than "by faith". This change would signify that faith does not cause God's grace but rather mediates it (Braaten, 1972, p. xxvii).

We have highlighted several acclaimed Protestant thinkers, particularly Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann,

whom we consider to be existentialists. Although the Swiss theologian Karl Barth is often identified as a leader of neo-orthodoxy, we would argue that his context aligns more closely with Kierkegaard's existentialism. Karl Barth, like Paul Tillich, argued that faith can be distorted. In Barth's renowned work "Der Römerbrief", he suggests that the world often prioritizes the satisfaction of religious needs and the creation of effective illusions about our understanding of God, rather than embracing a Christianity that truly reflects its essence (Barth, 1922, p. 14).

Barth was concerned that religion, unlike genuine faith, could manifest as a false form of spirituality, which is incapable of truly knowing a transcendently holy God. As a devoted follower of Reformation theology, Barth urgently called for a rethinking of the principle of "Sola Fide" in light of the experiences of World War I. He acknowledged that faith involves respect for the divine incognito and love for God through the recognition of the qualitative difference between God and humanity, as well as between God and the world. It also entails accepting the resurrection as a transformative event in the world, which is an acceptance of the divine "no" expressed in Christ, leading to a moment of awe and reverence before God (Barth, 1922, p. 16). In contrast, religious arrogance (Religiöse Übermut) must disappear if we are to establish a true understanding of God (p. 15). Throughout «Der Römerbrief», we are consistently reminded that an anthropological approach to God is untenable. In this context, Barth states: "Straightforwardly speaking of God and man as two partners moving on the same level is the worst distortion of truth (Vertrümmung der Wahrheit)" (Barth, 1922, p. 16). Interestingly, this is one of the only instances where the term "Distortion of Truth" appears. It is important to note that Barth does not directly address the issue of distortion of faith, however this topic is nonetheless present in "Der Römerbrief".

Barth's radical perspective on religion is notably articulated in his acclaimed work, "Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf". He critiques the use of the term "religion" – as well as the German word "Frömmigkeit" (piety) – arguing that some people prefer these terms over faith, which ultimately leads to its erasure and replacement. Moreover, Barth exposes present-day usage of the word faith, arguing it placed it into the procrustean bed of religion and piety. Now the question arises, what is behind this sharp critique of religion? We would argue that the cornerstone here is the shift from the anthropological perspective on faith to a transcendent one. If God is Wholly Other, then faith cannot be absorbed by the good deeds of religion, morality, and obedience (Barth, 1927, p. 303). In his commentary on the passage from "Die christliche Dogmatik", Professor Michael Weinrich highlights that, at the level of the general concept of religion, faith loses its necessity. It becomes merely a human option that can be disregarded without significant consequences (Weinrich, 2011, p. 266).

Another renowned Protestant existentialist was the German biblical scholar Rudolf Bultmann, whose contributions have led many to consider him both a textual critic and a companion of Martin Heidegger. Bultmann is often associated with the concept of "Entmythologisierung", the German term for demythologization. Like Karl Barth, he did not propose a compelling review of the distortions of faith, however, he made some indirect remarks in his work "Neues Testament und Mythologie: das Problem der Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung". This work focuses on distinguishing genuine faith from the tenets of myth, as Bultmann aims to clear as much as possible the mythological influences in the New Testament's background.

Bultmann argued that the knowledge of the forces and laws of nature has undermined belief in spirits and demons. Similarly, heavenly bodies, which we now understand as natural phenomena, are not demonic beings that enslave people and compel them to serve their own interests. According to Bultmann, we can no longer accept the mythological context of the New Testament worldview (Weltbild) due to scientific advancements that have shaped contemporary views of nature as a natural order. He believed that illnesses and healings have natural causes and are not the result of demonic influences (Bultmann, 1985, p. 15-16).

There are many misunderstandings about Bultmann's demythologization program. To address these misconceptions, it is important to discover Rudolf Bultmann's original intentions. In his acclaimed work «New Testament and Mythology», he emphasizes the incompatibility between the mythological worldview of the 1st century A.D. and that of the 20th century.

Given this context, Bultmann explains his approach as follows:

"While it can be said that even today, some people doubt the scientific view of the world, there are also those who hold onto primitive, mythological thinking. Superstitions abound, but the belief in spirits and miracles that has degenerated into superstition is fundamentally different from the originally held beliefs". (Bultmann, 1985, p.16).

According to Bultmann, the mythology of the New Testament should not be critiqued based on the objective content of its representations, but rather on their expressive content. The key question is regarding the truth of this understanding, which is affirmed by faith and

does not need to be intentionally linked to the symbols and concepts found in the New Testament (Bultmann, 1985, p. 16). Thus, demythologization is a way to seek genuine faith, while mythological elements distort it.

Conclusions.

Numerous debates have emerged regarding the nature of faith from both theological and philosophical perspectives. The biblical portrayal of faith is twofold: it is generally understood as a belief in sound teaching, while also being intended as a specific personal and existential experience. Consequently, any distortion of faith within biblical and religious contexts is considered heresy and apostasy. Theological analysis of faith distinguishes its intellectual, emotional, and volitional components. There are also a few confounded terms within this discussion, such as belief, hope, and trust. From a philosophical standpoint, faith is examined for its intellectual, rational, certain, and free elements. Furthermore, faith is understood as a dynamic process that involves thought and self-awareness, differentiating it from dogmatic (religious) faith. At the core of the distinction between Religious Faith and Philosophical Faith lies the concepts of dynamism and certainty.

Protestant existentialists like Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, and Rudolf Bultmann have critically addressed the distortion of faith, highlighting its various damaged forms throughout history. Tillich's work, "Dynamics of Faith," was written partly to clarify serious misunderstandings about the concept of faith. He argues that faith becomes distorted when viewed from an anthropocentric perspective, such as interpreting it solely as a form of knowing (intellectualism), as merely an act of doing (moralism), or as simply a matter of feeling (emotionalism). Additionally, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann have acknowledged another perspective on the distortion of faith within Protestant existentialism. Barth emphasized the radical otherness of God and the essence of Revelation, claiming that religion itself is a profound form of faith distortion, as it is based on an anthropological rather than a transcendent understanding and is, therefore, invalid. Bultmann's method of demythologization aims to clarify myths in order to uncover the genuine meaning of faith. He posits that myth represents a distortion of faith because it emphasizes an eschatological aspect while neglecting its anthropological dimension. The goal of Protestant existentialists has been to reduce the various forms of faith distortion to pave the way for a new and deeper understanding of genuine faith.

REFERENCES

- Barth, K. (1922). *Römerbrief (2 Aufl. 2. in neuer Bearbeitung) [The Epistle to the Romans]*. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag.
- Barth, K. (1927). *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf [Christian Dogmatics in Draft Form]* (Bd. 1). München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag.
- Braaten, C. (1972). Paul Tillich and the classical Christian tradition In P. Tillich, *The History of Christian Thought: From its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism* (pp.13-42). New York. A Touchstone Book.
- Bultmann, R. (1985). *Neues Testament und Mythologie das Problem der Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung [New Testament and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the New Testament Message]*. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag.

- Casewell, D. (2022). *Monotheism and Existentialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cochrane, A. (1956). *The Existentialists and God*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Emerson, M., & Bracey, G. (2024). *The religion of whiteness: how racism distorts Christian faith*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Feingold, L. (2016). *Faith Comes from What Is Heard: An Introduction to Fundamental Theology*. Steubenville: Emmaus Academic.
- Holy Bible: The New International Version*. (1984). Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Jaspers, K. (1984). *Der Philosophische Glaube angesichts der Offenbarung. (3 Aufl). [Philosophical Faith in the Face of Revelation]*. München, Zürich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag.
- Kenny, A. (1992). *What is Faith? Essays in the Philosophy of religion*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lawrence, R. (2024). *Editing Jesus: confronting the distorted faith of the American church*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.
- Macquarrie, J. (1965). *Studies in Christian Existentialism*. Montreal: McGill University Press.
- Macquarrie, J. (1973). *An Existentialist Theology: A comparison of Heidegger and Bultmann*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- McGrath, A. (2009). *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Thiessen, H. (1949). *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Tillich, P. (1957). *Dynamics of Faith*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Vicari, C. (2014). *How The New Christian Left Is Twisting the Gospel and Damaging the Faith*. Lake Mary: Frontline.
- Weinrich, M. (2011). *Religion und Religionskritik [Religion and criticism of Religion]*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Woodson, H. (2020). *Existential Theology: An Introduction*. Eugen: Wipf & Stock, 2020.