This paper revisits Tillich’s understanding of revelation and its relationship to historical developments and religious studies. On the one hand, this will be achieved through the engagement with Tillich’s thought in the years leading to the Second World War. Here, political issues regarding the socialist shape of Tillich’s thought in the 1920s and early 1930s will be examined. The Kairos, the decisive moment in history, is here interpreted against the historical background of the rise of Nazi regime. In conversation with Barth’s rejection of Tillich’s approach of the positive paradox, and by putting this into its historical context, it will be seen that Tillich emphasized the centrality of the revelation in Jesus Christ, while stressing emphatically that the Kairos in and of itself can never be revelation by itself.

On the other hand, this will be achieved through approaching revelation through the lens of Christianity and its attitudes to other religions. The question addressed in this second part will be where revelation is possible across different religions, and the existence of different media of revelation. It will be shown that Tillich maintains the centrality of the particular revelation of Jesus Christ, while affirming simultaneously the existence of revelation being possible across different religions. Another comparison with Barth will show that, instead of Barth’s ontological question of “where does God make Godself known?”, Tillich offers a discussion of the epistemological question of “how can God be known?”

Taken together, these two distinct parts will show the basic Christological shape of Tillich’s understanding of revelation throughout multiple decades of his theological work. Distinguishing clearly between revelation and the settings where revelation can occur (be it religion or history), Tillich approaches revelation from a Christological centre and appropriates it consistently to changing circumstances.