

Does Tillich's Theology of Art Have a Future? In Response to Russell Re Manning, *Theology of the End of Culture*, Paul Tillich's Theology of Culture and Art, in: C.Danz, W.Schlüssler eds., International Yearbook for Tillich Research, Wien/Berlin: Lit Verlag 2006, 197-208

DOES TILlich'S THEOLOGY OF ART HAVE A FUTURE?
In Response to Russell Re Manning, *Theology of the End of Culture: Paul
Tillich's Theology of Culture and Art*¹

Manning's book on Tillich's theology of culture and art is thorough, testifies to keen insight, and is challenging because it discusses the possibility of a Tillichian postmodern theology of culture. Given Manning's study, I want to investigate whether his suggestion for a Tillichian postmodern theology of culture is fertile. I will limit myself in this to Tillich's theology of art. Does his theology of art have a future? I will first give a short overview of Manning's study and then evaluate it. Next, I will, in connection with the question to be investigated, first indicate what I find valuable in Tillich's contribution to theological aesthetics, and then compare Tillich's and M.C. Taylor's theological approach to (post)modern art. I will close with a few remarks on Tillich's theology of art.

Manning on Tillich

Manning limits himself to Tillich's theology of culture and that of art as Tillich developed these in his article 'On the Idea of a Theology of Culture' (1919) and in articles he wrote in the 1920s before emigrating to the US. In the *first part* of his book Manning discusses the theological and philosophical sources of Tillich's theology of culture. The *theological source* is the liberal theology of mediation following Schleiermacher and Troeltsch. This cultural Protestantism should be distinguished from that of Ritschl and Harnack. The latter theologians were influenced by Kant's dualism of theology and philosophy and his dualism of thinking and being. Therefore, one cannot find in them anything of a correlation of religion and culture – which is precisely Tillich's concern. Tillich's position is also to be distinguished from the cultural isolationism of Kierkegaard and Barth.

The *philosophical source* of Tillich's theology of culture is Schelling's solution to Kant's dualism. Schelling's solution is to take as his starting point the absolute as the unity of thinking and being. Philosophy needs to start from the absolute, which Schelling identifies with the personal God. At the same time Schelling pointed out the problem of alienation between human beings and God, as well as the unity between God and human

¹ Russell Re Manning, *Theology of the End of Culture: Paul Tillich's Theology of Culture and Art*, (Louvain: Peeters, 2005). References in the text are to Manning's book, unless otherwise indicated.

beings. The tension between separation from and participation in God is a theme that can also be seen in Tillich.

The *second part* of Manning's study is a reconstruction of Tillich's theology of culture and art. The theology of culture is analyzed by means of the three concepts of religion, culture and theology, and is further clarified by means of Tillich's *The System of the Sciences (Das System der Wissenschaften* [1923]). In 'On the Idea of a Theology in Culture' Tillich calls theology '*the concrete and normative science of religion.*' That entails that theology is not a science with God as object nor that theology is the presentation of a 'particular complex of revelation' (121f.). The object of theology is religion and religion cannot be considered as something separate from culture. According to Tillich's *The System of the Sciences*, theology belongs to the 'sciences of spirit' or the 'normative sciences' (*Geisteswissenschaften*). The field of research of the normative sciences is threefold: *philosophy* (the doctrine of the principles of meaning [*Sinnprinzipienlehre*]), *history of culture* (the doctrine of the material meaning [*Sinnmateriallehre*]) and *systematics* (the doctrine of the norms of meaning [*Sinnnormenlehre*]). In connection with my commentary on Tillich's theology of art, I will go somewhat more extensively into Manning's reconstruction. Tillich's theology of art is the concrete application of his theology of culture to the aesthetic sphere.

Tillich himself does not provide any systematic theology of art. Therefore Manning reconstructs this by means of the abovementioned threefold research of the normative sciences (130, 136). With respect to 'the doctrine of the principles of meaning' Tillich shows that art has the function of 'expressing meaning.' The place of art in culture is important: it 'indicates what the character of a spiritual situation is' (136). If one wants to write a history of religion, then one needs to become acquainted with the visual art of a certain period. Unlike Manning and with Palmer, I would place Tillich's well-known distinction between form, content and *Gehalt* in this part of his theology of art.²

The second element, 'the doctrine of the material meaning,' gives a spiritual history (*Geistesgeschichte*) of art. Art is concerned with expressing meaning, but how do we determine that? Tillich does this by means of the concept of style. In Tillich, style is not a term of art history but a theological one and he defines it as 'the immediate influence of depth-content (*Gehalt*) on form' (139).³ Tillich arrives at a religious typology of styles in which he, as we will see, judges styles found in the history of art theologically according to the degree to which the *Gehalt* stamps the form. The depth-dimension of a work of art, the *Gehalt*, is expressed via a breaking through the form (the play of lines and colour) of a painting. In the power that breaks through the form something of ultimate meaning can be seen. Style and not content determines whether a work of art is religious (138). Thus Tillich writes in his article 'Religious Style and Religious Material in the Fine Arts' (1921):

² M. Palmer, *Paul Tillich's Philosophy of Art* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), 99.

³ 'Religious Style and Religious Material in the Fine Arts,' (1921), in *Paul Tillich on Art and Architecture*, ed. John and Jane Dillenberger (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 51. (Abbreviated hereafter as AA)

The essence of depth-content [Gehalt] ... is a definite basic orientation to reality in general. It is the final interpretation of meaning, the deepest grasping of reality; it is the function of unconditionedness that sustains all conditioned life-experiences, colors it, and prevents it from plunging into the emptiness of nothing All art is religious not because everything of beauty stems from God ... but because all art expresses a depth-content [Gehalt], a position toward the Unconditional.⁴

The third and last part of the theology of art, 'the doctrine of the norms of meaning,' concerns, according to Manning, the concrete religious systematization of art. The religious typology of art styles is applied to existing art. Tillich judges existing art styles in the light of his religious classification of styles.

If we start the typology of styles from the contrast of form and depth-content ... three basic types of style are the result: the form-dominated styles (impressionism-realism); the *Gehalt*-dominated styles (romanticism-expressionism) and the balanced styles (idealism-classicism).⁵

The expressionist style brings the *Gehalt* most clearly to expression. The term expressionism in Tillich covers not only what is known as a specific style of twentieth-century art but refers to an artistic style that can also be seen in Grünewald, Bosch, Dürer, Breughel, Goya en Michelangelo. Tillich also refers to the style of Neue Sachlichkeit as a new realism that shows the internal power of things in and through the external form (151).

The *third part* of Manning's book sketches the prospects of a Tillichian postmodern theology of culture. First the field of postmodern theology is outlined with the help of Gavin Hyman: on the one side stands Radical Orthodoxy (J. Millbank and P. Blond) and on the other postmodern theologians like D. Cupitt and M.C. Taylor. The burning question is how viable a Tillichian theology of culture and art is. Is Tillich not too modern because of his ontological realism, foundationalistic idealism or existentialism? Manning holds that Tillich is ambivalent with respect to modernism. He is neither a defender of modernity nor a prophet of postmodernism (174). Manning attempts to clarify Tillich's position in comparison with the two postmodern theological positions cited above.

Radical Orthodoxy is, like Barth, critical of culture. Instead of a correlation between religion and culture, here we find appropriation. Blond argues in his theology of art that modern art cannot develop any proper view of reality because it separates the ideal from the real. He claims that only a theological account of the perception of the world can see 'both as a participation in and as culmination of God, and God's glory' (183). Blond wants to replace the cultural by the theological and shows, along with other

⁴ AA, 52.

⁵ AA, 53.

representatives of Radical Orthodoxy, a yearning for a premodern Christian culture. It is clear that Tillich's theology of art differs from that of Blond.

Cupitt and Taylor do theology in light of Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God. Manning holds that 'a Tillichian postmodern theology of culture would be far closer to Taylor's project of a/theology' (191). But it does differ from the latter's a/theology. Taylor's fictionalism leads, in fact, to the disappearance of terms like salvation and meaning, whereas a Tillichian theology confirms the reality of the ultimate (191). Manning cautiously concludes that a Tillichian postmodern culture of theology is possible but then it should be viewed 'in the sense of a project of theology of culture which would be both distinctively postmodern and characteristically Tillichian ... a Tillichian postmodern theology of culture understood as a theology of the end of culture' (190f.).

An Evaluation of Manning's Book

What is exciting about Manning's book is that he places Tillich's theology of culture and art in a broad theological framework with respect to time. Tillich's theology is viewed retrospectively with respect to the tradition of nineteenth-century cultural Protestantism and in anticipation of contemporary postmodern theological discourse. It was primarily these two parts that I found enriching. Part Two, the reconstruction of Tillich's theology of culture and art produced little that was new, as far as the existing literature is concerned. For me, Manning's book raises the following points of debate:

1. Manning limits himself to the early Tillich's theology of culture and art. Precisely for the sake of a contemporary, (post)modern continuation of a Tillichian theology, it would have been of interest to explore how Tillich thought about culture and art after emigrating to the US. The Second World War resulted in a cultural emptiness and therefore Tillich has a different view of the correlation between culture and religion in his *Systematic Theology*. In his earlier theology of culture and art the reference to the ultimate is central, whereas in Tillich's later theology attention shifted to the 'question' in art and culture.

2. Manning provides a careful analysis of Tillich's theology of culture and art but nowhere does he critically evaluate it. I assume, therefore, that he wants to adopt it as it is, without any changes. He even defends Tillich's practice of thinking in two spheres – a theological appreciation of art disengaged from any aesthetic approach – against critics (152f.). Manning correctly refers to the proper right of a theological appreciation of art, but he does not make clear why the theologian, in his approach to art, should not employ art history and art criticism. After all, the academic specialist in biblical studies also uses the results of literary studies in his exegesis of the biblical text. In my conclusion to this article I will ask whether Manning is not too uncritical with respect to Tillich's theology of art.

3. Manning's attempt to develop a Tillichian postmodern theology of culture and art is vague. Is that not because the approach of Radical Orthodoxy on

the one side and that of Taylor on the other diverge too much from Tillich's starting point? Is Tillich's position, as Manning claims, closer to Taylor's?

In response to Manning's book, I will answer the question of whether Tillich's theology of art can have a future. I will begin with indicating what is valuable in Tillich's theology of art for theological aesthetics.

Tillich's Contribution to Theological Aesthetics

Tillich's contribution to theological aesthetics is important first of all because he does not view art as valuable because of the beauty that art can give but in the *meaning* or *insights* art produces. He writes:

For [art's] immediate task is ... that of expressing meaning. Art indicates what the character of a spiritual situation is; it does this more immediately and directly than do science and philosophy for it is less burdened by objective considerations. Its symbols have something of a revelatory character while scientific conceptualization must suppress the symbolic in favor of objective adequacy.⁶

Thus, by means of paintings from the Gothic period, the early Renaissance period, the Baroque period and the nineteenth century, Tillich shows how the relationship between the individual and the group has changed over the course of time.⁷ It is through the *Gehalt*, the metaphysical depth, that paintings acquire their religious meaning. In this Tillich is primarily concerned with insight into human existence as alienated. Reality is experienced as broken: 'Disrupted forms of our existence are taken by themselves by modern artists as the real elements of the reality.'⁸ A still life by Cézanne no longer presents organic forms idealistically but conveys a sense of 'the disrupted forms of our existence.' By looking below the surface of the organic forms the powers of being in which our existence consists are made visible. Van Gogh also looks for the creative forces of nature below the surface, as his *Starry Night* shows. With respect to human society, according to Tillich, Van Gogh sketches in *Night Café* 'in all the beautiful colors ... the horror of emptiness'. Munch produces paintings with 'horror, crime, shock, that which is uncanny ...' Picasso's *Guernica* shows 'immense horror,' whereas Braque's *Table* presents the 'dissolution of the organic realities which we usually think of when we speak of a table' In Tillich's emphasis on alienation one can see a relationship between his theology of art and Adorno's aesthetics.

Also important for the relation of art and religion is that Tillich avoids an attitude of exclusivism, i.e. an attitude of possessing the whole truth without recognising that insights from art can be enriching. Tillich's theology has been deeply influenced by his study of art.⁹ A mild form of

⁶ 'The Religious Situation' (1926), AA, 67. For his claim about beauty see note 4.

⁷ 'Mass and Personality' (1922), AA, 58-66.

⁸ For this and the following see 'Existentialist Aspects of Modern Art,' (1955), AA 94-96.

⁹ W. Schuessler, 'Die Bedeutung der Kunst, Kunstgeschichte und der Kunstphilosophie für die Genese des religionsphilosophischen und kulturtheologischen Denkens Paul Tillichs,' in: P. Tillich, *Kunst und Gesellschaft*, Tillich-Studien, Vol. I, (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 49-87.

expressionism can be found in the Dutch theologian and phenomenologist of religion G. van der Leeuw in his theology of art, *Sacred and Profane Beauty*. He considers art enriching for the church, but art outside the church does need to be baptised. Manning points to a strong form of exclusivism in Blond's study of art from the perspective of Radical Orthodoxy. Modern art falls short, in Blond's view, with respect to its vision of the reality of the creation. Either the subjective aspect is emphasised too much in the perception, as in impressionism, or the objective aspect is stressed too much, as in Cézanne's later work.¹⁰ The problem of right perception is how the ideal and the real converge therein. Blond holds that the answer is given only by Christ:

for he *and he alone* teaches us that the Most High and the most ideal has been incarnated here in our world as the most explicit account of the union of ideality and reality Christ shows us in the form of his own wordly body that form is invisible, and, for us, nothing at all, unless it informs and takes up reality, and that subjectivity is nothing at all, unless it extends beyond itself to take up that which has always been given.¹¹

Such a view, that only theology can fathom reality correctly, would be for Tillich, as Manning also states, a form of heteronomy, in which the forms and laws of thinking and acting are made subordinate to a religion of the church. Because of his *broad concept of religion* Tillich manages to avoid this exclusivism. He looks at art outside the church from the perspective of its capacity for 'expressiveness,' the extent to which the metaphysical meaning (the *Gehalt*) stamps the form, the play of lines and colours. Certain modern works of art can, according to Tillich, perceive reality very well, as he indicates in Cézanne, Van Gogh, Munch, etc. I should also point out that Tillich's later question/answer method led some in the 1960s to exclusivism in the use of literature for theology: literature only raises the questions of human existence to which theology gives the answers.¹²

In short, Tillich appreciates art outside the church. He indicates how its religious character is to be established and shows how art is enriching for theology because it expresses meaning and insights concerning human existence, primarily that of alienation.

Tillich's Theology of Art in the Current (Post)Modern Situation

Manning explores the possibility of a Tillichian postmodern theology of culture. Tillich's position differs, as we saw, from Blond's exclusivism. Manning holds that a Tillichian postmodern theology of culture would be much closer to Taylor's project of an a/theology. He does point out here the difference between Taylor's 'negative dialectics' under the influence of his

¹⁰ P. Blond, 'Perception: From Modern Painting to the Vision in Christ, in: *Radical Orthodoxy: a New Theology* (J. Millbank et al.), (London/New York, 2001), 225-27.

¹¹ Blond, 'Perception,' 321.

¹² G. Langenhorst, *Theologie & Literatur*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 20-26.

Neo-Hegelianism and the influence on Tillich of Schelling's positive philosophical theology of mythology and revelation.¹³ Is Tillich closer to Taylor? To determine that, I will compare the theology of art in Tillich and Taylor by means of Taylor's impressive book, *Disfiguring Art, Architecture, Religion* (1992).¹⁴

Taylor shows how twentieth-century art is done between the poles of nineteenth-century Romantic and Idealistic theoesthetics and his own a/theoesthetics. Theoesthetics strives for unity with the absolute or Real that lies hidden in the human being and the world (52). Friedrich Schiller replaced religion by art, for art reconciles. In his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1793-94) Schiller describes the establishment of an aesthetic state in which people are connected harmoniously with one another. The artist-philosopher educates the people in this (31). Taylor sees this utopian desire for wholeness and unity with the absolute also in art at the beginning of the twentieth century. Theologically, the problem of twentieth-century art is how to represent the absolute. Taylor sketches the struggle of artists in the twentieth century to represent the absolute in three phases; *abstraction*, *figuration* and *denegation*.

In *modern art*, the phase of abstract art and of modern architecture, it is a matter of disfiguring 'by removing figures, symbols designs, and ornaments.' Taylor discusses, among others, painters like Braque, Kandinsky, Malevich, Newman (49-95) and architects like Le Corbusier, Van Doesburg and Mies van der Rohe (97-142). These artists strive for union with the absolute origin, which they want to reach by abandoning figuration. The goal is the presentation of pure form, of 'a void that is not a void, but full. An absence that is not absence but present' (50). The divine is represented in abstract art, as in Malevich, as absolute emptiness and pure formlessness. The theological parallel of abstract art is Karl Barth's view of transcendence (99-102). Taylor criticises this representation of transcendence, because it cannot be distinguished from the emptiness of Nothingness: 'When God (or the Real), who is the ground of meaning, is "totally other", human discourse becomes insignificant and thus empty [D]ivine transcendence is indistinguishable from the death of God' (142).

In *modernist postmodern art*, the phase of figuration, figuration returns in the 1960s in pop art and postmodern architecture. Taylor points to, among others, painters like Duchamps, Rauschenberg and Warhol (143-84) and to architects like Venturi and Moore (186-228). The true reality is now immanent; it is the image. Every form of transcendence and depth has disappeared. There is only surface. The images no longer refer to God as an independent reality, but God himself has become an image. 'In the absence of transcendence, there is no beyond in the name of which to negate, to reject, or resist what is. Contrary to popular understanding, pop art is idealistic – *it is the idealism of the image*' (181). The theological parallel is Altizer's theology of the death of the transcendent God, with its accent on

¹³ Manning adds (191): 'although with a caution against the underlying neo-Hegelianism [*sic*] of Taylor's 'negative dialectics' in the name of a Schellingian positive (narrative) philosophical theology of mythology *and* revelation.'

¹⁴ M.C. Taylor, *Disfiguring Art, Architecture, Religion*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992). References in the text are to this work.

immanence. The divine presence is sought in the here and now. God and human beings do not stand over against one another but the divine finds its completion in universal humankind. History is the incarnation of God (155-58).

In *postmodernism sensu strictissimo art*, the phase of denegation, Taylor describes architects like Tschumi and Eisenman (229-67) and painters like Heizer, Pistoletti and Kiefer (269-307). They are searching for a new position now that the previous ones, the opposition between transcendence and immanence (the first phase) as well as the inclusive logic of the second phase in which transcendence is immanent, have proven to be unsatisfactory. In both previous phases reconciliation with the 'Real' was sought. In the third phase, Taylor argues, the oppositions are brought together *without* reconciliation. This is a form of negation that does not sublimate the negation (as in Hegel) but affirms it: 'Disfiguring neither erases nor absolutizes figure but enacts what Freud describes as the process of 'denegation', through which the repressed or refused returns' (230). One struggles 'to figure the unfigurable.'

Disfiguring is a third way between abstraction and figuration. Other than in modernism representation is unavoidable, but unlike the modern postmodernism of the second phase representation is not absolutised. In Kiefer's painting *Zim Zum* that which cannot be represented 'appears' by disappearing in and through tears of the representation. This painting shows a scorched earth with a gray hole in the middle of the painting, a darkness above which the earth hovers. Taylor gives his own a/theological commentary that the creation of the world rests on a withdrawal by God, a desertion that leaves the world with a permanent deficit. Here the withdrawal of that which cannot be represented is represented in this way (305). The task of art in this third phase is, according to Taylor, 'rend(er)ing': rendering the rending.

For Kiefer, as for Heizer and Pistoletto, the work of art is rending. To be opened by the tears of art is to suffer a wound that never heals The end of art: Desert Desertion The errant immensity of an eternity gone astray is the desert in which we are destined to err endlessly. (307)

Related to this phase in art is Taylor's own a\theology. It compares the situation of the human being with the desert that is seen as desertion. The motto of the book *Disfiguring* is a good indication of Taylor's view, citing Jean-Luc Nancy: 'our experience of the divine is our experience of its desertion. It is no longer a question of meeting God in the desert: but of this – and *this* is the desert – we do not encounter God, God has deserted all encounter.'

This rough sketch is sufficient to show the extent to which Tillich's theology of art can be compared with that of Taylor. Both reject theoesthetics but do so for different reasons. Taylor's a\theology speaks of the denegation of God. After the death of God the religious person should give up the dream of redemption. Tillich holds on to the striving for the reconciliation of God and human beings but rejects theoesthetics insofar as the latter attempts to

replace religion by art. Tillich recognises that a certain form of unity of the self and the world is reached in art. That is why, he argues, art is viewed in theoesthetics as the highest self-expression of life and art is to replace religion. He rejects this view:

A work of art is a union of self and world within limitations both on the side of the self and on the side of the world. The limitation on the side of the world is that although in the aesthetic function as such *one*, otherwise hidden, quality of the universe is reached, ultimate reality, which transcends all qualities, is not reached; the limitation on the side of the self is that in the aesthetic function that self grasps reality in images and not with the totality of its being. The effect of this double limitation is to give union in the aesthetic function an element of unreality.¹⁵

Taylor and Tillich are both critical with respect to the second phase, figuration in pop art. Taylor holds that this art emerges from an attitude of affirming everything. On the basis of an absolute tolerance nothing is refused (227f.). Thus the possibility for resistance and criticism of dominant systems disappears. Tillich holds that in this art, as a reaction to expressionism, 'an artistic revolt against the disruption of the surface reality is taking place.'¹⁶ This art is concerned with the conventional aspects of experience and daily life. Nevertheless, he holds that this is not just a return to naturalism. When Tillich cites concrete examples like Roy Lichtenstein, Tom Wesselman, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, he does so critically. He remarks, for example, that Lichtenstein in his *Engagement Ring* uses comic strip figures 'that are all surface and bring the most vulgar daily reality before our eyes. Yet in some sense it is still expressionistic, and represents a new kind of reduction of reality.'

Regarding the third phase, postmodern art, one can certainly recognise, from the perspective of Tillich's theology of art, the 'representation' of the tear in reality. But Tillich explains this theologically in a very different way from how Taylor does. The difference between Tillich and Taylor lies in their differing views of the unity with the absolute, the unity of the finite and the infinite. In this respect Tillich is closer to the theoesthetics of the Romantic and Idealistic tradition than to Taylor's a\theoesthetics. In his erring, in his being underway 'in the absence of the Way,' 'without the hope of resurrexit' (319) Taylor renounces the striving for reconciliation and the revelation of the ultimate in the world. It is precisely that towards which Tillich's theology of art is directed with its stress on the *Gehalt*, the metaphysical depth of the work of art. Taylor holds, with artists like Heizer and Kiefer, that art cannot represent the essence of reality via abstraction. In contrast, Tillich holds that art, such as expressionism, can do that.

In short, other than Manning, I consider Tillich's theology of art to be very different from Taylor's. Manning blurs that difference by bringing in Blond's third position. Through his comparison of Tillich with Blond and

¹⁵ *Systematic Theology*, (London: James Nisbet), 3, 69.

¹⁶ For this and what follows see 'Religious Dimensions of Contemporary Art' (1964), AA 180f.

Taylor, Tillich's theology of art as a possibility for the future does not emerge as clearly as it could.

A Future for Tillich's Theology of Art?

Tillich's contribution to theological aesthetics is of great importance. But how can Tillich's theology of art be fruitful now and for the future? This is possible by proposing some changes to Tillich's theology of art so that a dialogue between art and religion can emerge. The proposals I am making are, of course, only for consideration and to invite further discussion about this issue.

As a Christian theologian, Tillich views the unconditional as the personal God of Christian faith. The objection is that he reads his theological view into evocations of the ultimate in art. Nuovo points out that art is also a kind of thinking but that there is no justification for Tillich's claim that 'that there is and can be one and only one metaphysical content which is the ground of all meaning and the ultimate truth of all human expression must be abandoned.'¹⁷ Tillich looks at art from his theological view of God as the ground and as abyss. Thus, in my view, the theological considerations of other representations of the ultimate in art are too quickly cut off in advance. Moreover, not only that Tillich looks at art from an a priori fixed view of Transcendence but he also decides *a priori* how *Gehalt* should be expressed in the art of painting.

It is precisely in criticism of the ecclesiastical and theological formulation of transcendence that other ways have been sought in art to represent Transcendence, as in Romanticism. In 'Tintern Abbey' Wordsworth describes a presence that he feels in the light of the setting sun, the ocean, the air and also in the human spirit. There was a general need at the end of the eighteenth century to replace the traditional rituals and images of the Christian church by personal experiences of the divine. Let us take as an example the well-known painting by Casper David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* (1819). This painting evokes the experience of an individual over against the overwhelming, incomprehensible expanse of the universe as if the mysteries of religion have been transferred to the world of nature.¹⁸ In Wordsworth and Friedrich there is an immanent transcendence that is felt as a meaning or presence in the natural phenomena themselves.

Further analysis should look at how such an experience of the divine in and through the landscape is to be theologically appraised. Is it an enrichment of the Christian tradition or in tension with it? Tillich calls the Romantic style a 'Gehalt-dominated, subjective attitude.'¹⁹ As such, this is not incorrect, but – and this is the point -- his typology of styles cuts off too quickly further analysis for determining precisely what Wordsworth and Friedrich mean by transcendence by dictating how the *Gehalt* should be expressed in the art of painting. The model for this is the way in which

¹⁷ V. Nuovo, 'Tillich's Theory of Art and the Possibility of a Theology of Culture,' in *Religion et Culture*, ed. M.Despland *et al.*,(Québec: Presses de l' Université Laval 1987), 403.

¹⁸ R.Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition*, (New York: Harper and Row 1975), 14f.

¹⁹ 'Religious Style and Religious Material in the Fine Arts,' AA 53.

transcendence is evoked in expressionism, namely as the breaking through the surface of reality. If we limit ourselves to the *Gehalt*, the metaphysical depth, then we pass too quickly over the way in which art outside the church, in Romanticism or abstract expressionism, evokes transcendence.

In the 1950s in New York, the abstract expressionism of, among others, Newman, Rothko, Pollock and Still arose. Tillich did not react very much to this movement, whereas it could have been the occasion for him to expand his requirement of expressiveness.²⁰ Precisely this movement shows that Tillich's categories for expressive art fall short. Dillenberger is correct when he writes:

Here was an art ... in which the polarities of form and import [*Gehalt*], fundamental to his thinking about art, were genuinely expressed. Here was an art in which the surface was not necessarily disrupted, a qualification so central to Tillich's view of expressionistic art. Yet this art had depth and ultimacy, and the range of the human condition.²¹

Let us take, as an example, Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950/1). This is an immensely large canvas, 242 cm. high and 513.6 cm. long. The colour looks like cadmium red. The canvas is cut in different places by vertical stripes (zips) of different colours. Viewed from left to right there is one resembling red, one white, one chestnut brown and one dark yellow. Newman hopes that everyone who sees the painting will get a sense that he *lives*.²² The feeling of space that he wants to evoke he calls 'a feeling of place.'²³ Newman was to get this content across in his paintings by the emotional experience of space and colour. Without a doubt, *Vir Heroicus Sublimus* is about the experience that Tillich describes in the same period in his *The Courage to Be* (1952) as the experience of Being-itself. Every person experiences, in the courage to exist, the Power of Being. In Newman the experience of a feeling of place is also an experience of the Power of Being. But the 'representation' of transcendence does not meet Tillich's criterion of expressiveness, the breaking through the surface, the form. That is not what abstract expressionism, which rejects figuration, does. Newman evokes transcendence in a different way. There appears to be an analogy between the romantic striving to reproduce the divine in and through landscape and the attempt of abstract expressionism to capture the transcendent in paint. The analogy lies in the naturalisation of the transcendent. The world of the ideal is in both cases sought not outside but in tangible reality and is thus never present as a problem but always as the momentarily felt 'beyond' in the experience of a limit.²⁴ It is the experience of the limit but also the experience of something more. After discussing the different possible

²⁰ For Tillich's brief remarks on abstract expressionism see 'Art and Ultimate Reality' (1959), AA, 147 and 'Religion and Art in Contemporary Development' (1964), AA 168f.

²¹ 'Introduction' by John Dillenberger in AA xxi.

²² 'Interview with Dorothy Seckler,' in *Barnett Newman Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. J.P. O'Neill, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 250.

²³ David Sylvester, "Interview," in *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments*, ed. M.Auping, (New York: H.N.Abrams, 1987), 144.

²⁴ According to R.de Vall, *Een subliem gevoel van plaats: een filosofische interpretatie van het werk van Barnett Newmann*, (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij 1994), 393.

experiences that *Vir Heroicus Sublimus* can evoke in the viewer, de Vall writes:

But it can also be a feeling of being at home in the chaos and incomprehensibility of this time and this world, albeit differently than you thought. As the intense sense of the here and now that Newman calls a feeling of your own presence. As the 'feeling of your own totality, your own particularity, your own individuality, and at the same time your connection with others who are also particular beings' As a feeling of place.²⁵

In addition to recommending a broader description of expressiveness so as not to cut off, on the basis of his own theological view, other views and representations of transcendence, I would propose another correction to Tillich's theology of art.

Tillich is concerned primarily with *pointing to the unconditional or ultimate in art, whereby the content is of secondary interest*. In this respect there is a parallel with the formalism of C. Greenberg, R. Fry and C. Bell, who judge a work of art only with respect to form. In Tillich, it is the *Gehalt*, i.e., as stated above, the extent to which the *Gehalt* determines the form, the play of lines and colours. The content, the representation, is of less interest. A painting is, after all, according to him, not religious because of its representation, a Christ or Madonna figure, but whether it has metaphysical depth. Here one should indicate what precisely is meant by the 'content' of a painting. Content can be viewed as what Meyer Schapiro has called 'the object matter,' as representation, the objects or situations that a (realistic) painting shows or as 'the subject matter' of a painting. Abstract expressionist paintings, such as *Vir Heroicus Sublimus* do not 'represent' anything but they do have content as subject matter. One series of paintings Newman calls *Stations of the Cross*. This series consists of fourteen large canvases of different shades of gray, gray-white, and white, most of them with vertical stripes (zips) in black, black spots or white. They do not depict the fourteen stations of Catholic tradition, but nevertheless Newman called them *Stations of the Cross*. The 'subject matter' of these paintings without representation is the suffering of Christ. When Tillich does not find the content of importance, then he means content as representation. Viewed as subject matter, he does consider content important, if it is stamped by *Gehalt* or, stated more strongly, content as subject matter is subordinate to the *Gehalt* of a painting. He writes:

It is indeed possible to see in a still life of Cézanne, an animal painting of Marc, a landscape of Schmidt-Rottluff, or an erotic painting of Nolde the immediate revelation of an absolute reality in the relative things; the depth-content of the world, experienced in the artist's religious ecstasy, shines through the things; they have become 'sacred' objects.²⁶

²⁵ De Vall, *Subliem gevoel*, 433.

²⁶ 'Religious Style and Religious Material in the Fine Arts,' AA 54.

The disadvantage of this one-sided attention for *Gehalt* is that the richness of other subject matter that is treated in art receives too little attention in Tillich's theology of art. Tillich does indeed talk about subjects like alienation and negativity in art, but other topics in art are also interesting for theology such as the experience of God's grace, the Christ figure not only in his suffering but also in his redemption and resurrection. Here one needs to ask which type of art – painting, music, plays or films -- can best express which theme.

Tillich manages to avoid exclusivism, but, due to his reading of his identification of the ultimate with the God of the Christian faith into art and culture, it is difficult for him to avoid the position of *inclusivism*, the annexation of evocations of the ultimate in art into Christianity. Therefore I have elsewhere proposed broadening the basis for a dialogue between art and religion.²⁷ Instead of Tillich's broadened concept of religion I would rather take 'worldview' as the basis for this dialogue. I understand that this entails a different theology of culture from Tillich's. I hold with Tillich that art is interesting for theology because it evokes the ultimate in its own way. Art is interesting also because it expresses worldview insights that can be important to theology. Therefore, in addition to painting, literature, for example, is also important. Thus Paul Fiddes, for example, shows in his *The Promised End* how the end of the human beings and the world is depicted in literature and relates that to the way in which theology talks about the end, eschatology. K.-J. Kuschel shows in his studies on Jesus in literature how Christology can be enriched by acquaintance with this. Thus there is, with respect to the relation between art and religion the position of dialogue in addition to that of exclusivism and inclusivism.

In short, with Manning I consider Tillich's theology to be fruitful also for the future, but only if it incorporates the corrections proposed above.

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²⁷ W. Stoker, *God meester in de kunsten, een herweging van de theologische esthetiek*, (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam 2006).