These days scientists have every right to object to theology’s unwarranted interference in their fields that obey their own specific laws, just as theologians view the remarks concerning theology coming from other sciences as alien intrusions. Such a demarcation between the sciences and theology defends the rightfulness of their respective autonomy in their special foundations, subject matter, method of examination and purpose. At the same time, due to the universality of knowledge the supposed duality of truth that seemingly presents an insurmountable barrier between the sciences and theology is untenable; not to mention the fact that the representatives of science – be they the natural sciences or scholarship – sometimes admit that they cannot reach satisfactory results until they clarify the ground of Being that resides in the depths of their field of examination. Unearthing it, though, is the task of philosophy, and through its conceptual system, that of theology.

It is the protestant Paul Tillich who, from the side of theology, suggests that it is necessary to recognise and discover theology as the ultimate determinant of one or the other special area of culture behind cultural phenomena, be they philosophy, a political system, history, the arts, ethics or societal norms. The reason is that we experience from a non-theological perspective, from the side of the social sciences, the arts and literature, that culture itself is constantly the subject of examination, while this examination is less pronounced from the side of theology. The self-understanding of culture now boasts of an enormous and constantly expanding literature, while its evaluation from the standpoint of systematic theology is still to happen, and still appears only as a demand. Paul Tillich suggests therefore that the approach he calls the theology of culture (Theologie der Kultur) should be taught in all institutions teaching theology, in the interests of the momentous goal of doing away with the barrier between the sciences and theology under the auspices of a universal understanding of truth. With the theology of culture Tillich describes a theological methodology that leaves the independence of the research of specific sciences intact, while at the same time unearthing the ground of Being of the subject under examination, so that understanding can speak with the demand for universality on the ground of a common fundamental reality.

In his essay published in 1919, Über die Idee einer Theologie der Kultur, Paul Tillich already suggested the idea of a theology of culture from the standpoint of apologetics. In a much later study, published in New York in 1959, and entitled Aspects of a Religious Analysis of Culture, Tillich already enumerates the aspects of the application of cultural theology in the different areas of cultural functioning, such as the church, history, politics, technology, the arts and medicine.

In the groundwork of his piece written at a young age he draws attention to the fact that religion is not an emotion, but the manifestation of the Spirit in a complex unity of practice, theory and emotion. It is about the fundamental realisation that this unique relationship between the religious principle and the cultural functions creates a religious cultural sphere. In the area of

---

religious knowledge this religious cultural sphere is *myth* and *dogma*, in the area of religious aesthetics the *cult*, in the religious formation of the person *salvation*, in the area of religious social form *the church*. In these forms religion comes into being in that *the cultural functions outside religion possess the existence of the religious principle*. Of course, the spheres are separated – voften in great cultural conflicts – as the state and the church, the arts and the cult, science and dogma. The validity of this separation exists, however, only as long as the cultural functions are kept apart from religion in a heteronomous way. In this way, though, a certain duality of truths and principles develops, which is untenable from the viewpoint of the universality of knowledge. This duality can come to an end if *the threat of the other in the autonomy of intellectual life is dissolved*. The solution is only possible in the area of the sciences and the arts with the introduction of the idea of religion.

In Tillich, the introduction of the idea of religion means that the ultimate ground of Being that determines culture is illuminated and surfaces through the forms of cultural autonomy. This surfacing of the ground of Being is paradoxical in the sense that it possesses the force of doubt and negation as well as discernment and statement. Tillich expresses the basic rule of cultural theology as follows: „Where the *autonomy* of science asserts itself absolutely, all *heteronomy* through religion becomes impossible, therefore science – as a Whole – stands under the *theonomy* of the paradoxical fundamental religious experience.‖

Paul Tillich describes the experience of theonomy most clearly with respect to *content* and *form*. His strating point is that autonomous cultural values, cultural functions assume a form (Form) that have special laws, nevertheless, with the help of these laws theonomy expresses itself in the content (Gehalt) as reality. Naturally, content and form cannot exist without each other. The more form there is, the more autonomy; or the more content is expressed, the more theonomy there is.

Within the concept of religion revelation (Offenbarung) has the quality that the form is always insufficient for its overflowing, abundant content. Moreover, reality in its overflowing fullness breaks the form that wants to contain it; although this breaking apart is also form itself. For the theologian dealing with the overflowing content of revelation the specific task is the uncovering of the reality of the Unconditional in the depths of cultural forms. „*The task of the theology of culture is to discover and express this process in all the areas of culture and its products.*” But not from the viewpoint of form, as do the cultural sciences involved, but from the aspect of content, as it is the specific task of cultural theology. Because the concrete religious experiences that underlie great cultural phenomena want inevitably to come to the surface.

Thus, examining cultural theology we need to take into account the *duality of form and content*. Tillich, however, warns of a careful distinction while examining content. *Content* (Gehalt) is somewhat different from *object* (Inhalt). *Inhalt* is the *objectivity* that belongs to its intellectual – cultural sphere; *Gehalt* is the *spiritual substantiality* (geistige Substanitialität) that lends its meaning to form. The *essential content* (Gehalt) captures and expresses the *objective content* (Inhalt) with the aid of form. In this process of examination the *objective content* (Inhalt) is accidental, while the *essential content* – as intrinsic reality – is a given. *Form* (Form) is the mediator between the two.

---

4 Paul Tillich: *Über die Idee einer Theologie der Kultur* pp 15-18
5 ibid. 19
Form has to adjust to **objective content** (Inhalt), therefore the culture of form and the culture of objects do not stand in opposition – in contrast to the culture of **essential content** (Gehaltskultur). The breaking apart of form by **essential content** calls forth the insignificance (Unwesentlich-Werden) of the **objective content** (Inhalt). Form loses its essential connection to the objective content (Inhalt), because the objective content (Inhalt) vanishes before the all-encompassing fulfillment of essential content (Gehalt). In this way form triumphs as „separated“ (Losgelöstes) and „liberated“ (Freischwebenes) and gets directly into the orbit of essential content (Gehalt), losing its natural and inevitable relationship with the objective content (Inhalt). At this point the **essential reality** appears in the essential content – in Tillich’s words **religious reality** (religiöse Realität) with its Yes and No over against things.\(^6\)

In his systematic theology also, finding the common theonomy of religion and culture, Tillich reaches the essential reality that helps him make sense of culture’s rootedness in religion. „**Religion is the substance of culture, and culture is the form of religion**“ – is the tenet he states, and he expounds this tenet in a dialectical manner: „What we have to state again is that religion without culture cannot even express itself in meaningful silence, since it gains all sensible form expression from culture. And we need to state also the fact that culture loses its depth and abundance without the finality of the ultimate.”\(^7\)

So, to sum up, we can say that the correlation of **religion and culture** is the foundation on which Tillich’s cultural theology is built. Jürgen Moltmann is right in considering the whole life-work of Tillich as the creation of cultural theology that can also be considered a religious understanding of the secular world.\(^8\) In fact, it is an apologetical cultivation of theology. It is clearly visible that in the application of cultural theology Paul Tillich considers three aspects in each cultural function, namely the church, in history, politics, technology, the arts and medicine:

1. the relationship between the autonomy, heteronomy and theonomy of cultural forms;

2. the interoperability of form (Form), object (Inhalt) and content (Gehalt) of cultural forms, especially with respect to the **essential reality** (religiöse Realität) expressed in the content;

3. the evaluation of cultural forms according to the YES and NO of essential reality (religiöse Realität).

For an understanding of the applicability of Tillich’s cultural theology let us take a double example from the field of the arts: two representations of shoes. One is Van Gogh’s painting *A Pair of Shoes* (1889), and the other is Gyula Pauer’s *Shoes on the Bank of the Danube* (2005), a bronze Holocaust memorial. At first glance, these two works of art have nothing to do with religion, since both are separated from religion by the heteronomy that possesses the laws of the creation and understanding of these pieces. The two works of art are also different, they represent a specific (autonomous) world in terms of their creators, genre, age, circumstances, making and purpose, which can be uncovered only by an autonomous art history in an authentic manner. They resemble each other only in terms of their form (Form): they represent used shoes from which their owners already stepped out; but in terms of their object (Inhalt) they signify different things. Van Gogh wished to depict, through the used pair of shoes, the sorely tried life-prints of their workingman

---

\(^6\) ibid. 20

\(^7\) Paul Tillich: *Systematic Theology* ibid. 545.

wearer and the frailty of humans; while sculptor Gyula Pauer carved in bronze in their left-behind shoes the memory of the citizens shot into the Danube by members of the arrow-cross party in the winter of 1944.

In the interpretation of these two works of art the approach of cultural theology means that it takes extremely seriously the autonomy of these pieces, in their making and in their art-historical interpretation, while the dividing line, heteronomy becomes impossible in the wake of the universality of Revelation, so that the work of art – as a Whole – is placed under the theonomy of the fundamental paradoxical religious experience. This means that the form (Form) of these works – the shoes – lose their connection to the object (Inhalt) – to the arrangement of a still-life by Van Gogh, or the memorial of the martyrs by Pauer – which now becomes insignificant, while before the all-encompassing fulfillment of the essential content (Gehalt) the form of the shoes triumphs as „separated“ (Losgelöstes) and „liberated“ (Freischwebenes). At this point, within the essential reality (Gehalt), the religious reality (religiöse Realität) of the worn-out shoes becomes manifest, which gives voice to the drama of religious truth in both the shoes by Van Gogh and by Pauer: social sin and its consequences, the sacrifice, death and resurrection of the human being. The hardships of a Dutch working man’s life in the uniquely deformed footwear, the stepping out of tired feet from these worn-out shoes, as from a coffin, the going to rest of the tired feet, their exit refers to the risen, now unseen body, just as in the footwear left on the bank of the Danube refer to the shamed, excluded, painful and torn apart life of the victims of the Holocaust, whose scandal ebed Adonai, the suffering servant of the Lord took upon himself. At the same time, the theological-ethical inference will also become valid: both the social-economical oppression and the inhumanity of state totalitarianism, but above all contempt, indifference and lethal prejudice will come under judgment. The religious reality standing on the foundation of theonomy with its NO denies the exclusivity of both the autonomous and the heteronomous interpretations: the one-sided, idealistic, moralising or ideological explanations of the works of art depicting shoes; at the same time it says YES to the objectivity of the autonomous art history evaluating these works, the naked historical reality that was the reason for the creation of these pieces, but, together with these, the existential agitation breaking forth from religious reality due to the form of the shoes.

9 see Isaiah 53