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Home, Sweet Home! Escape from the Technical City and Artistic Beauty

„In the middle of the 19th century no society was considered predominantly urbanized”¹ – Béla Tomka states, and adds: „One and a half centuries later all industrialized countries, and a major part of less developed ones belonged to this category. Moreover, the process of urbanization has continued in many respects, although often with major changes in content.”² Among the definitions of urbanization it is the cultural definition that says that urbanization means a special quality of social connections, where urban ways of thinking and behaving are typical³. In this paper we try to find an answer to the question of what, in the early theology of Paul Tillich, the consequences were of social, cultural and moral changes due to urbanization.

The technical city

In his 1927 lecture *Logos, Myth and Technology*⁴ Tillich was definitely in favour of technology. At the same time, in his 1928 paper *The Technical City as a Symbol*⁵, the technologically developing city is a symbol, into which humans escape from the world that seems enormous for them. At that time Paul Tillich was a professor of the Technische Universität in Dresden. With the help of technology humans, like priests, arrange the world, recognize its laws and relations, and with the help of this knowledge they „drive back its demonic depth”⁶. Humanity has conquered the world with the aid of science and technology. Humans set up as an example nature that is to be treated technologically and create forms and figures with its help. Through this, „a new category of technological beauty is created.”⁷ Tillich also asks the question whether technology is really in the service of freedom, or whether the whole world changes into a technical city, which covers up the reality of the world calling to us, and prescribes what we need to do⁸.

The technical city is the symbol of transformation, division and alienation, but at the same time it promises the hope of feeling at home. One is not merely forced into it, but escapes to it, and with the help of technology one forms it into something that feels secure, as opposed to the reality outside the city. Yet Tillich’s question is whether the reality of the technical city is able to conceal the reality that calls upon us.

In the middle of the twentieth century, examining the relationship of art and religion, Tillich pointed out the reality-transcending nature of artistic imagery and the unity of the spheres of life

¹ Béla Tomka: *The Social History of Europe in the 20th Century*, Osiris, Budapest 2009. web http://tankonyvtar.hu/en/tartalom/tamop425/2011_520_europa_tarsadalomtortenete/ch10html (viewed: 02.22.2016.)

² *ibid.*

³ L. S. Bourne: *Reinventing the suburbs: Old myths and new realities*. *Progress in Planning*, vol.46 (1996) no.3. 163-184

⁴ Tillich, Paul: *Logos, Mythos and Technik*. In. *Logos*, 16, pp356-365.

⁵ Robert Marshall refers to it in his „Mit gläubigen Realismus in einer Kulturstadt” but he does not indicate the source.

⁶ Robert Marshall: *Mit gläubigen Realismus in einer Kulturstadt*. Paul Tillich in Dresden. In. Nord, Ilona-Spiegel, Yorick (Hrsg): *Spurensuche. Lebens-und Denkwege Paul Tillichs*. Lit. Verlag, Münster 2001. p 132.

⁷ See Marshall 2001. p 132.

⁸ cf. Marschall 2001. p 132.

separated by alienation, but originally belonging together. In Tillich's view art is a concept over against culture⁹. Grözinger is right in emphasizing that Tillich's concept of art has a theological character, since culture and religion are dependent on each other in it. That is why Tillich can say that „religion is the substance of culture, and culture is the form of religion¹⁰“. Insofar as culture includes a religious dimension, art also expresses that which touches humans unconditionally. Grözinger defines the Tillichian understanding of culture, and thus art, as idealistic, because it cannot consider the fact of sin, insofar as religion is present in culture substantially. Although he concedes that aesthetics and theology have always referred to each other¹¹. Tillich, however, understands the separation of art and religion as the consequence of alienation, that has far-reaching consequences. In the volume entitled *About Art and Society*, published in 1952¹², that includes three lectures by Tillich, the first one is entitled *Human Nature and Art*. In this he defines the relationship of art and philosophy as follows:

„No creative philosophy lack the artistic spirit entirely, and no creative art lacks the philosophical spirit entirely. Human nature says no to division. Although we must keep the division due to its expediency, and sometimes we must enlarge it even more, but if we ask what the purpose is our always acting in a goal-oriented way, then the answer must be that the ultimate purpose of human endeavor is the human being¹³.“

The subdivision of cultural functions without the possibility of reunification, is a sign of the alienation of humans from themselves, because the goal of each function is itself¹⁴. Tillich goes on to say that the human being has a world, and „has divided himself into parts: such as body and soul, theory and practice, sense and sensibility, religious and secular¹⁵“. His completeness has been lost, although his humanness shows up in the details. Tillich criticizes not only this fragmented picture of humanness, but also emphasizes the darkening of the meaning of the relationship of humans to their world. Humans have gotten to know more and more, with the aid of the sciences, about the conditions of their bodily existence, but the body (Leib), as a means of existence¹⁶ had for a long time lost its importance, and appeared in the forefront of interest only at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Humans exist not out of themselves, but as hurled into existence and conscious of being cast out of it in the future. Although they are „conscious of infinity. Conscious of the fact of belonging to it, but also of being excluded from it“. ¹⁷ Between the two poles of the consciousness of finiteness¹⁸ and the knowledge of belonging to infinity, the desire arises „to express the essential unity of what

⁹ Grözinger, Albrecht: *Praktische Theologie und ästhetik*. Albrecht Grözinger – Chr. Kaiser, München, 1987. p 76.

¹⁰ quoted by Grözinger 1987. p 77. Tillich: *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. IX. p 84.

¹¹ Grözinger 1987. p 77.

¹² Tillich, Paul: *Kunst und Gesellschaft. Drei Vorlesungen (1952)*. Lit Verlag, Münster 1994.

¹³ Tillich 1994. pp 14-15.

¹⁴ Tillich 2004. p 15.

¹⁵ Tillich 2004. p 15.

¹⁶ Tillich 2004. p 15.

¹⁷ Tillich 2004. p 16.

¹⁸ This idea already appeared with the Greeks, who called humans Mortals, as opposed to the gods who were immortal. Animals are also characterized by mortality, but they were not called Mortal, because they do not belong to infinity. Humans are filled with fear of their finitude (Angst). „Fear is the consciousness of finitude.“

we are in religious and artistic symbols".¹⁹ In this way of thinking, it is clear that religion and aesthetics fundamentally belong together, as the sense and observing of being, and the answer to being, whose expression is symbolic. „Man makes gods appear as symbols of what created him, the infinity from which he comes, from which he has been separated and to which he longs to return.”²⁰ In this way, humans pre-empt the unity with God in their present. Through the religious and artistic expression of this pre-empted unity man obtains courage to accept his finiteness, which results in the Courage to Be (Mut zum Sein).²¹The finitude and infinity of humans have an effect of all areas of their culture, in the way of finitude and the fear of it, as well as potential infinity and the courage to be.²²The technical city as a symbol is an expression of human creativity, a form of making the world feel like home.

Tillich stresses as one way of partaking in the world knowledge as the cognitive partaking in the world, whereas the individual partakes in the appearance and structure of objects and their relationships in a limited fashion, while at the same time feeling that something is missing.²³ Tillich demonstrates this lack through the example of the tree, about which science can offer a lot of information, but cannot say anything about its inner meaning, its force of expressing the power of being, in which everything that exists is present. „Yet there is a way that leads into this hidden quality of something, and this way is the work of art. All art reaches the depth of things, which lies outside the sphere of knowing.”²⁴

„In art unification, unifying love reigns.”²⁵ All forms of partaking can be understood as love, and love is the unification of the separated. Knowledge, art and community are the three directions of movement of that which leads to the restoration of lost unity, that which awakens the feeling of being at home. Tillich ask the question of how this restoration can happen. Taking human freedom as a starting point, it can be defined as „finite freedom”.²⁶ Freedom makes it possible for humans to transcend all worldly states of their finitude, which can be done in different directions and in different ways. One of these is technology: „man is in a position to create a world over technological products, which is limitless in space and time”.²⁷ The technical world, which, due to the finitude of man, is directed towards the infinite, ensures that the pre-empted unity, in which finitude ceases to be, in its details and fragmentariness should unify in time and realize its purpose, even if this is not possible in an absolute sense or within the existence of finite man: „Art does three things: it expresses, transforms and pre-empts. It expresses man’s fear of reality, which it discloses. It transforms traditional reality, to give it power to express something that is not itself. It pre-empts the possibilities of existence, which transcends given possibilities.”²⁸

The transformation of reality, however, cannot happen merely through the artist’s individuality and characteristic talent, because a work of art must also satisfy certain general rules of art. In Tillich’s

¹⁹ Tillich 2004. p 16.

²⁰ Tillich 2004. p 16.

²¹ Tillich, Paul: The Courage to Be. Theological Literary Society, Budapest 2000.

²² Tillich 2004. p 17.

²³ Tillich 2004. p 17.

²⁴ Tillich 2004. p 17.

²⁵ Tillich 2004. p 19.

²⁶ Tillich 2004. p 19.

²⁷ Tillich 2004. p 20.

²⁸ Tillich 2004. p 21.

words: „Transformation is defined by the rules of art, which have a universal and a particular side. Transformation has rules that apply to all art. And there are rules that define a certain style.“²⁹

Transformation as the way of artistic expression (Ausdruck) can be compared to the method of scientific exploration. On the one hand, in both cases it is preceded by a curiosity about reality, the desire to unveil the unknown and therefore seemingly terrifying and on the other, the proper depiction of that which was unearthed.

In Tillich's work, we can find three ways of defining beauty. The first is in the sense of creation, which causes joy through its harmonious form. The second is when beauty has a certain power, that is, it lends meaning to certain areas by which they transform the world – then art is by necessity beautiful. Tillich states that unfortunately beauty is typically used in its first meaning and not the second. And the problem with the first meaning is that it does not touch upon artistic style. Tillich says, however, that transformation and beauty can also mean something totally different: „It can mean the transformation of what is given in such a way that it becomes the symbol that which the given transcends.“³⁰ For example, looking at a landscape a creative encounter can happen in which spirit calls the inner power of the landscape. „The joy caused by this encounter is the joy of Eros, of love that reached its goal of reunification. This can still happen only through aesthetic form, which manifests the qualities of life that reunifying Eros draws us towards.“³¹

The third concept by which Tillich characterized artistic creativity was pre-empting, that is, the pre-empting of a state of completeness, „where the state of imperfection, in which we exist, is transcended.“³² This pre-emptive task is realized by the fact that in a work of art the classical ideal of beauty is re-established, which means perfection and completeness.

In his second lecture, „Culture, Society and Art“³³, Tillich takes as his starting point the fact that culture is created not by the individual, but by society, in which religion is present not as an elemental part, but as substance. Religion is understood by Tillich as „the state of ultimate fascination“. This approach has as its advantage that in this way religion integrates religions, and as the substance of culture „gives meaning (Sinn) to all cultural products“.³⁴ Because humans live in this culture as social beings, they perceive other people as their own boundaries which cannot be passed, but which demand a mutual acceptance. Laws and obligations came into being in the meeting of individuals, and man has applied these to nature in the form of physical laws, and to spirit in the form of cognitive and aesthetic laws. Culture has technological, practical and theoretical aspects. Technological and artistic creativity have long belonged together in architecture.³⁵

In his third lecture, „Religion and Art“, Tillich emphasizes the importance of the „state of ultimate fascination“, the fascination by a wish (Anliegen/aim), which is not transitory, like the object

²⁹ Tillich 2004. p 22.

³⁰ Tillich 2004. p 23.

³¹ Tillich 2004. p 23.

³² Tillich 2004. p 24.

³³ Tillich 2004. p 25.

³⁴ Tillich 2004. p 25.

³⁵ Tillich 2004. p 30.

of other wishes, and can be expressed by the great commandment to love God with all our heart.³⁶ So the content of this desire is God, from whom man is separated.

„We are separated from that which is the real object of our ultimate desire, the ground and meaning of our existence. Because we are separated from the ground of being, we are always and temporarily attracted by secular desires, desires that fill our lives, even if they may disappear in the blink of an eye which will doubtlessly happen.“³⁷

This is why religion can be a fundamental part of culture. Religion expresses the desire of humanity, it expresses it through its symbols, tries to pre-empt the consummation of desire (a being of lack), when it possesses, realizes and transforms the temporary. The separateness of the sacred and secular, God and the world, the state of alienation is a proof of primordial sin.³⁸

We started out with the question whether technology is really in the service of freedom, or whether the whole earth becomes a technical city, which conceals the reality of the world calling to us and prescribing what we need to do. Art pre-empts unity, the reality of the world calling to us can be called forth even by looking at a tree. Over against the technical city, the process of urbanization it is the desire for a natural environment, or distinctly the ecological village, organic city planning that can be the expression of the changed direction that aims at the restoration of the unity of human nature and its created environment.

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³⁶ Tillich 2004. p 37.

³⁷ Tillich 2004. pp 37-38.

³⁸ The carrier of culture is language, which cannot merely be tied to speech, but „is present in reading and writing“. Similarly, it is also expressed in a receptive and creative form in art. „Only the being who can speak is able to paint.“ In Greco-Roman culture, therefore, logos and verbum were the principle of divine self-disclosure. Although they were visual cultures, but they realized that no visual encounter with reality is significant without the „listening word“, through which we perceive reality.

Tomka Béla: Európa társadalomtörténete a 20. században. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest 2009. web.
http://www.tankonyvtar.hu/en/tartalom/tamop425/2011_0001_520_europa_tarsadalomtortene/ch10.html (viewed: 22. 02. 2016)