

No. 13

~~DIMENSIONS~~ Tillich Lecture, mailed from office to NY dailies
and radio stations.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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(copied from Dr. Tillich's hand-written manuscript)

Dimensions 1959

ART AND ULTIMATE REALITY by Dr. Paul Tillich, Tuesday, Feb 17, 1959

It is a great and unexpected honor that I have been asked to give an address in a place which for years has been for me a favored oasis within this beloved city of New York. It is an unexpected honor; for I am far away from what should be considered an expert in the visual arts or in any other art. I could accept the invitation to speak tonight here only because the Museum planned a series of art - and - lectures, the first of which was to be "Art and Religion." It is the religion angle from which I am supposed to look at the visual arts, and this means that I must do it as a theologian and philosopher.

A disadvantage of such an approach is obvious: One must conceptualize and generalize where intuitive penetration into the particular ~~area~~ *creation* is the first and ^{all} determining task. And it is a well known fact that many artists feel *uneasy* if their works are submitted to general categories. Nevertheless art criticism is as necessary as literary criticism. It serves to guide one to the point where the immediately intuitive approach to the particular work can occur. In the light of ~~attempts to make itself~~ the demand to make itself superfluous attempts of conceptualization like the following should be judged.

The series of the art - and - lectures was supposed to begin with a lecture on art and religion. I intend to speak about art and "ultimate reality" a subject which, though including religion, transcends by far what is usually called religious. Ultimate reality lies on the ground of every reality, and it characterizes the whole appearing world as non-ultimate as preliminary, transitory and finite. These are philosophical terms. But the attitude in which they originally have been conceived is universally known. It is ^{the} awareness of the deceptive character of the surface of everything we encounter, which drives us to ask for that which is below the surface. But soon we discover that even if we break through the surface of a thing or a person or an event new deceptions *expect* us. So we try to dig further through what lies deepest below the surface, the truly real which can not deceive us. We search for an ultimate reality, for something remaining in the *flux* of transitoriness and finitude. All philosophers searched for it even if they called change itself the unchanging in all being. They gave different names to ultimate reality expressing in such names their own *anxieties*, their longing, their courage, but also their cognitive problems and their discoveries about the outcome of reality. The con-
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ception^s in which ultimate reality is expressed, the way ~~philosophically~~ philosophy reached them and applied to^{them} the whole of reality fills the pages of the history of philosophy. It is a fascinating story just as the history of the arts in which ultimate reality is expressed in artistic terms. And actually, they are not two histories. Philosophical and artistic expressions of the experience of ultimate reality correspond with each other. But dealing with such parallels would trespass the limits of my subject.

The term "ultimate reality" is not another name for God in the religious sense of the word. But the God of religion would not be God if he were not first of all ultimate reality. On the one hand the God of religion is more than ultimate reality. On the other hand religion can speak of the divinity of the divine only if God is ultimate reality. If He were anything less, namely a being, even the highest, He would be on the level of all other beings. He would be conditioned by the structure of being like everything that is. He would cease to be God -- from this follows a decisive consequence - If the idea of God included ultimate reality, everything that expresses ultimate reality, expresses God, whether it intends to do so or not. And there is nothing that could be excluded from this possibility because everything that has being is an expression of being itself, of ultimate reality, however preliminary and transitory it may be.

The word expression requests some consideration. First, it is obvious that if something expresses something else as e.g. language expresses thoughts, they are not the same. There is a gap between that which expresses and that which is expressed. But there is also a point of identity between them. It is the riddle and the depth of all expression that it reveals and hides at the same time. And if we ~~may~~ say that the universe is an expression of ultimate reality we say that the universe and everything in it, both reveals and hides ultimate reality. This should~~prevent~~ prevent us from a religious glorification of the world, as well as from an anti-religious profanisation of the world. There is ultimate reality in this stone and this tree and this man. They are translucent towards ultimate reality. But they are also opaque towards it. They prevent it from shining through them. They try to exclude it.

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Expression is always expression for someone who can receive it as expression, for whom it is a manifestation of something hidden and who is able to distinguish expression and that which is expressed. Only man within the world we know can distinguish between ultimate reality and that in which it appears. Only man is conscious of the difference of surface and depth. There are three ways in which man is able to experience and express ultimate reality in, through and above the reality he encounters. Two of these ways are indirect, one of them is direct. The two indirect ways of expressing ultimate reality are philosophy, more specifically metaphysics, and art. They are indirect, because it is their immediate intention to express the encountered reality in cognitive concepts or in aesthetic images. Philosophy in the classical sense of the word, seeks for truth about the universe as such. But in doing so philosophy is driven towards explicit or implicit assertions about ultimate reality. We have already pointed to the manifoldness of such concepts, and "ultimate reality" is itself one of them. In the same way art while trying to express reality in aesthetic images, makes ultimate reality manifest through these images. (The word image, taken in the largest sense, which includes lingual and musical figures.) To show this concretely is the main purpose of my lecture, and I feel here supported by the self interpretation of many artists who tell one that their aim is the expression of reality. But there is a third, namely the direct way in which man discerns and receives ultimate reality. We call it religion in the traditional sense of the word. In it ultimate reality becomes manifest through estatic expression of a concrete revelatory character and is expressed in symbols and myths. Myths are sets of symbols, They are the oldest and most fundamental expression of the experience of ultimate reality. Philosophy and art take from their depth and abundance. Their validity is the power with which they express the relation of man and his world to the ultimately real. Out of a particular relation of this kind they are born. With the end of this relation they die. A myth is neither primitive nor primitive poetry, although both are present in them as in a mother's womb up to the moment in which they become independent and start their autonomous road.

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On this road both undergo an inner conflict, similiar to that in all of us, between the bondage to the creative ground from which we come and our ~~satisfaction~~ free self actualization in our mature life. It is the conflict between the secular and the sacred. Secular philosophy is usually called philosophy simply and secular art simply, which in connection with the sacred namely, the direct symbols of ultimate reality, philosophy is called theology, and art is called religious art. The creative as well as destructive consequences of this conflict dominate many periods of man's history. A reduction of these tensions and a removal of some of their distinctive consequences would certainly happen, if the decisive point in the following considerations were established. It is the assertion that the problem of religion and philosophy as well as that of religion and art is by no means confined to theology and religious art. but that it appears wherever ultimate reality is expressed through philosophical concepts and artistic images and the medium through which this happens is the stylistic form of a thought or an image.

Styles must be deciphered. And for this one needs keys with which the deciphering can be done, keys which are taken from the very nature of the artistic encounter with reality. It is not my task to point to such keys for the deciphering of styles in general or of the innumerable collective and personal styles which have appeared in history. I only intend to point to those stylistic elements which are expressive for ultimate reality. The best way to do this seems to me to look at the main types in which ultimate reality becomes manifest in the great manifestations of man's religious experience. They express in a direct way the fundamental relation of man to ultimate reality, and these expressions shine through the artistic images and can be seen in them.

On this basis I suggest to distinguish five stylistic elements which appear, in innumerable mixtures, in the great historical styles in East and West, and through which ultimate reality becomes manifest in works of art. (After each of them I want to show pictures as examples without discussing ~~them~~ them concretely and with the awareness of the contingent character of the choice)

I. The first most universal and most fundamental type of religious experience is the sacramental one. In it ultimate reality appears as the holy which is present in all kinds of objects, in things, persons, events. In the history of religion

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almost everything in the encountered world has become a bearer of the holy, a sacramental reality. Nothing, even the lowest and ugliest is excluded from the quality of holiness from the power of expressing ultimate reality in the form of here and now. For this is what holiness means and not moral goodness, as a moralistically distorted religions assume. This is actually no genuine religion in which the sacramental experience of the divine being present does not underlie every religious utterance.

This enables us to discover the first stylistic element which is effective in the experience of ultimate reality. It appears predominately in what often has been called magic realism. But because of the non-religious meaning of magic I prefer to call it numinous realism, derived from numen ~~appearing~~ divinity with a divine-*demonic* quality. It is realism, it depicts ordinary things, ordinary persons, ordinary events, but it is numinous realism, it depicts them in a way which makes them strange, mysterious, laden with an ambiguous power. It uses space-relations, body stylisation, uncanny expressions for this purpose. We are fascinated and repelled by it. We are grasped by/~~ultimate reality~~ ^{it} as by something through which/~~mysteriously~~ ^{ultimate reality} shines. Much primitive art has this character. It does not exclude other elements. But this is most conspicuous and this is its greatness which has been rediscovered when our contemporary artists were driven to similar forms by the inner development of their artistic visions. These visions have received different names. On the development of cubism from Cezanne to Braque at least one element of numinous realism is present. It is present in the stilo metaphysics of Chirico and in the surrealism of Chagall. It appears in those contemporary painters and sculptors who unite the appreciation of the particular thing with cosmic significance they gave/~~it~~ ^{to}. All this is the correlate to religious sacramentalism. It shows ultimate reality as present here and now in particular objects. Certainly it is created by artistic demands, but it does more than fulfilling these demands, intended or not intended. It expresses ultimate reality in the particular thing. But it is not without dangers religiously and ~~artistic~~ artistically. The religious danger of all sacramental religion is idolatry, the attempt to make a sacramentally consecrated reality into the divine itself. This is the demonic possibility which is connected with every sacramental religion. The artistic/~~danger~~ ^{losing} is that things are used as mere symbols/~~their~~ independent power of expression. The

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line between an artificial symbolism and the symbolic power of things as bearers of ultimate reality is difficult to draw. Perhaps one can say that wrong symbolism makes us look away from a thing at another one for which it is a symbol, while genuine symbolic power in a work of art opens up its own depth and the depth of reality as such.

(*Pictures* I, 1 - 11)

II. Related to the sacramental type of religion and at the same time going beyond it radically is the mystical type. Religious experience tries to reach ultimate reality without the mediation of particular things. We find this type actualized in Hinduism and Buddhism, in Taoism and Neoplatonism, and, with strong qualifications on some places in later ^{Judaism} ~~Indoism~~, Islam and Christianity. It can undergo a transformation into a monistic mysticism of nature under the famous formula Nature. In it God is equated with nature namely with the creative ground of nature, which transcends every particular object. We find this in ancient ^{Asia} ~~times~~ as well as in modern Europe and America. Correlated to this religious type is that stylistic element in which the particularity of things is dissolved into a visual continuum. This continuum is not a grey in grey; it has all the potentialities of particular beings within itself, like the Brahman in Hinduism and the One in Neoplatonism, within themselves include the possibility of the whole world. ~~within themselves~~. The continuum contains tensions, conflicts, movements. But it has not yet come to particular things. They are hidden in a mere potential state. They are not yet ~~actual~~ ^{so} actual as distinguishable objects or if they ~~are~~ shine through from far as before creation. We find this in Chinese landscapes in which air and water symbolize the cosmic unity and individual rocks or branches hardly dare to emerge to an independent existence. We find it in the background of Asiatic and Western paintings, even if the foreground is filled with figures. It is a decisive element in the impressionist dissolution of particulars into a continuum of light and ^{or S} ~~columns~~. Most radically it has been carried through in what is called today non-objective painting. The lastest decade e.g. of American painting is dominated by it. Of course, one cannot show ultimate reality directly, but one can use basic structural elements of reality like ^{or S} ~~columns~~, lines, planes, cubes as symbols for that which transcends all

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reality. And that is what the non-objective artists have done. In the same period in which Eastern mysticism enters powerfully the American scene, American artists have deprived reality of its manifoldness, of the concreteness of things and persons and have expressed ultimate reality through the medium of elements which ordinarily appear only in unity with concrete objects on the surface of reality.

Here also the dangers must be seen. The sacred emptiness can become mere emptiness, and the spatial emptiness of some pictures indicates merely artistic emptiness. The attempt to express ultimate reality by annihilating reality can lead to works in which nothing is expressed, at all. It is understandable that as such a state in religion has led to strong reactions against the mystical in art to strong reactions against the ^{non}objective stylistic element.

(pictures II, 1 - 6)

III. Like mysticism the prophetic - protesting type of religion goes beyond the sacramental basis of all religious life. Its pattern is the criticism of a demonically distorted sacramental system in the name of personal righteousness and social justice. Holiness without justice is rejected. Not nature but history is the place of the manifestation of ultimate reality. It is manifest as personal will, demanding, judging, punishing, promising. Nature loses its demonic as well as its divine power, it becomes subject to man's purposes as thing and tool. Only on this religious basis an industrial society like that in which we are living could arise.

If we now ask which stylistic element in the visual arts does correspond to such an ~~experiential~~ experience of ultimate reality we must answer it is "realism" both in its scientific - descriptive and in its ethical-critical form. After nature has been deprived of its numinous power it could become a matter of scientific analysis and technical management. The artistic approach to this nature is not itself scientific but it deals with objects, prepared as mere things by science. ^{As far as it is} ~~on its~~ artistic creation it is certainly not imitation of nature, but it brings out possibilities of seeing reality which enlarge our daily-life encounter with it and sometimes antecede scientific discoveries. The realistic element in the artistic styles seems far removed from expressing ultimate reality. It seems to hide it more

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than ~~more than~~ ~~move them~~ to express it. But there is a way in which descriptive realism can mediate the experience of ultimate reality. It opens the eyes for a truth in the encountered world which is lost in the daily life encounter with it. We see as something unknown what we believed to know by meeting it day by day. The unexhaustable richness in the soberly, objectively, quasi-scientifically observed reality is a manifestation of ultimate reality, Although it is lacking in ~~diversity~~ ^{directly} numinous character. It is the humility of accepting the given which gives it.

~~It is the humility of accepting the given which gives it critical realism~~

Critical realism is predominately directed to man, personally, socially and historically. Although the suffering in nature is often taken into the artistic expression of the ugliness of encountered reality. Critical realism as e.g. given by Bosh and Breughel, by Callon and Goya, by Daumier and Ensor, by Grosz and Beckmann, shows ultimate reality by judging existing reality. In all those enumerated, it is the injustice of the world which is subject to criticism. But it is done in the works of art and this very fact elevates critical realism above mere negativity. The artistic form separates critical realism from simple fascination with the ugly. But of course, if the artistic form is lacking, not ultimate reality but nothing than distorted reality appears, and this is the danger of this stylistic element, as it is the danger of some kinds of merely intellectual pseudo - criticism, ^{to fall into a} ~~a negatively~~ negativity without hope.

(III, 1-9)

IV. The prophetic critical type of religion has hope. This is the basis of its power. If the element of hope is separated from the realistic view of reality a religious type appears which sees in the presence the anticipation of future perfection, ^{that} which prophetic hope expects is affirmed as given in form of perfection which ~~is~~ the artists can produce in the world ^{of} images. The self-interperatation of the Renaissance as "^{Society} ~~society~~ reborn" was particularly conductive for this attitude. But it had predecessors e.g. ⁱⁿ the classical period of Greece, and successors, e.g. in modern attempts to renew ^{the} ~~their~~ stylistic element. ^{As} ~~It~~ in a religious attitude it can be called religious

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humanism which sees God in man and man in God here and now, in spite of all human weakness. It expects the full realization of this unity in history and anticipates it in artistic ~~creativity~~, *creativity*.

The artistic style expressing it is usually called idealism, a word which is today in such a state of dispute that it is almost impossible to use it for anything valuable. But not only the word the matter itself was under harsh criticism. In the period in which the numinous - the descriptive and the critical-realistic element came into the foreground and in which the expressionistic element dominated the whole development, the idealistic tradition was despised and rejected, it was seen as unable to mediate ultimate reality in spite of the innumerable religious pictures it has produced. I myself shared in ^{this} mood. The change occurred when I realized that idealism means anticipation of the highest possibilities of a being, that it means remembrance of the lost and anticipation of the regained paradise. Seen in this light it certainly is a medium for the experience of ultimate reality. It expresses the divine character of man and his world in their essential, undistorted, created perfection.

But more than in the ^{other} stylistic elements the dangers must be emphasized, which threaten artistic idealism. It is the danger of confusing idealism with a superficially and sentimentally beatifying realism. This has happened ~~next~~ on a large scale, especially in the realm of religious art, and is the reason for the disrepute into which idealism, both, word and matter have fallen. Genuine idealism shows the potentialities in the depth of a being or an event and brings them into the existence of artistic images. Beautifying ~~idealistic~~ realism shows the actual existence of its object but with idealizing dishonest additions. This danger must be avoided if we now come to attempt to create a new classicism. I am afraid that this warning is now very much on time.

(IV, 1-6)

V. ~~The~~ The great reaction against both, realism (except numinous realism) and idealism was the expressionistic movement. To which religious type is it correlated? Let me call it the estatic-spiritual type. It is anticipated in the Old Testament, it is the religion of the New Testament and of many movements in later Church history

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it appeared in sectarian groups again and again, in early Protestantism, in ^{religious} Romanticism. It appears in unity and conflict with all other religious types. It is marked by its dynamic character, in disruption and creation. It accepts the individual thing and person, it is realistic and mystical, it criticizes and anticipates, it is restless and ^{painting} granting to eternal rest. It is my conviction as a Protestant theologian, that this religious element although it appears everywhere as a ferment and ⁱⁿ many places finally highly developed comes into its own within Christianity.

But our problem is, how does this type express itself in the visual arts? Which stylistic element corresponds to it? I believe that the expressionistic element is the artistic correlate to the ecstatic-spiritual type of religious experience. Ultimate reality appears, "breaking the prison of our form" ^{as} the hymn about the Divane Spirit says. It breaks to pieces the surface of our own being and that of our world. This is the spiritual character of expressionism (taken in a much longer sense than the German school of this name). The Church was never happy with ecstatic-spiritual movements, they seemed to destroy its sacramental foundation. Society today was not happy with the great expressionist styles in past and present, because they have broken and are still breaking through the realistic and idealistic foundations of modern industrial society. But just this belongs to the manifestation of ultimate reality. Expressionistic elements are effective and even ~~dominating~~ ^{ant} dominate in many styles of past and present. In our Western history they determine the art of the catacombs, the Byzantine, the Romanesque, most of the Gothic and the Baroque style, and the recent development since Cezanne. There are always other elements cooperating but the expressionistic element is decisive in them. Ultimate reality is powerfully manifest in these styles, even if they disregard symbols of the religious tradition. But ~~it~~ history shows that styles which are determined by the expressionistic element are especially adequate for works of art which deal with the traditional symbols.

But we must also mention the dangers of the expressionistic element in artistic styles. Expression can be understood as the expression of the subjectivity of the artist as in the religious sphere the Spirit can be understood ^{as} ~~an~~ an ecstatic-chaotic expression of religious subjectivity. If this happens in religion, ecstasy is confused with _____ and _____ does not break through any form and does not create anything new. If a work of art expresses only the subjectivity of the artist, it remains arbitrary and does not penetrate into reality itself.

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The main point in the discussion of the five stylistic elements which can become ~~indications~~ indications of ~~the~~ ultimate reality was to show that the manifestation of the ultimate in the visual arts is not dependent on use of works which traditionally are called religious art. I want to conclude with a few remarks about the nature of such matters and their relation to the five stylistic elements, discussed. If art expresses reality in images and religion ultimate reality in symbols, then religious art expresses religious symbols in artistic images (as theology expresses religious symbols in philosophic concepts). The religious content, namely a particular and direct relation of man to ultimate reality, is first expressed in a religious symbol, and secondly in the expression of this symbol in artistic images. In this relation it can happen, that in the work of art as well as in the encounter with it the one of *two* expressions may prevail over the other one: The artistic form may swallow the religious substance, objectively or in personal encounter. This possibility is one of the reasons for the resistance of many religious groups against religious art, especially in a devotional context. Or the religious substance may evoke pictorial products which hardly can be ~~the~~ called works of art, but which exercise a tremendous religious influence. This possibility is one of the reasons for the easy deterioration of religious art in the use of the Churches.

The avoidance of both shortcomings is a most demanding task for the religious artist. Our analysis of the five stylistic elements may be useful in this respect.

Obviously the stylistic element which we have called numinous realism is an adequate basis for religious art. Wherever it is predominant in the primitive world, the difference between the religious and the secular is often unrecognizable. In the recent form of numinous realism the cosmic significance of such works under the control of this element is obvious, but it is hard to use them for the highly personalistic stories and myths of the religions of the prophetic type.

The mystical-pantheistic element of artistic styles resists radically the attempt to use it for the representation of concrete religious symbols. The non-objective art like its mystical background is the elevation above the world of concrete symbols, and only symbols of this elevation above symbols can be expressed in artistic images.

Descriptive and critical realism if predominant ^{at} in a style, have opposite difficulty. They can show everything concretely religious in its concreteness. But only if united with other elements they can show it as religious. Otherwise they secularize it and

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and make out of Jesus a village teacher or a revolutionary fanatic or a political
~~or~~ ^{victim} often borrowing sentimental traits and beatifying dishonesty from the
distortions of the idealistic style. This is the seat of most religious "Kitsch"

A further problem ^{is} of religious art under the predominance of the fourth stylistic
element, the anticipating one. Anticipation of fulfillment can of course, most
easily be expressed through figures of the religious legend and myth. But one thing is
lacking: The estrangement of the actual human situation from the essential unity of the
human ^{with} the divine, the reality of the cross which critical realism shows in its
whole empirical brutality and which expressionism shows in its paradoxical significance.
Because this is lacking even in the greatest works under the predominance of the
idealistic style, it can ~~be~~ ^{come} the other source of "Kitsch" in religious art.

The Expressionistic element has already indicated the strongest affinity to
religious art. It breaks both through both the realistic acceptance of the given and
the idealistic anticipation of the fulfilled. And beyond both of them it reaches into
the depth of ultimate reality. In this sense it is an ecstatic style-element,
expressing the ^{ec}xtatic character of encountered reality. Nobody can overlook this
ecstatic element in the great religious art, however different the combination of this
element with the other stylistic elements ~~may~~ may be. To show these ecstatic-
spiritual character in the expression of ultimate reality in the many great periods of
religious art in East and West is a task to which the ideas of this lecture could only
lay the foundation. It is enough if they have done this and made somehow visible the
manifestation of ultimate reality through the different stylistic elements which appear
in different relation to each other in all works of the visual arts.

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- 3. Chagall I and the Village
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- 6. Braque Man with Guitar
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- 11. ~~Asakura (Jap.) Landscape~~ Lippold Full Moon (Variation 4)

- II 1. Anhicaga (Jap.) Landscape
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- III. 1. Corbet Wave
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IV.1. Della Francesca Queen of Sheba and Soloman

2. Perugina Courage and Temperance

3. Poussin Landscape

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5. Pissarro Life

6. ~~Poussin~~ Rousseau Dream

V. 1. Van Gogh Hills at St Riems

2. Munch The Scream

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4. Mark Yellow Horses

5. Schmidt-Rotluff Peter Fishrnj

6. Heckel Prayer

7. Nolde Pentacost

8. " Prophet

PABL TILICH, one of the great Protestant theologians and philosophers of our time, will be available for interview in New York City on February 15, 1951. He will be in the city in connection with the publication of "Tilich and Gollwitzer," a collection of essays in his honor edited by Walter Leibrach, to be published February 15, by Harper & Brothers. Among the eminent contributors are Reinhold Niebuhr, Rudolph Eucken, Karl Barth, Erich Fromm and Charles Lumsden. Albert Einstein wrote enthusiastic encouragement to the editor on the project.

Author of 25 books, Dr. Tillich has expounded his ideas on the relation of religion to politics, art, sociology, philosophy and depth psychology. It is his conviction that religion is not one compartment of life, but the "ground" of every aspect of life. Actively interested in psychoanalysis, he has stated its importance in elaborating the doctrine of the Christian man.

Born in Germany, he was the son of a Lutheran pastor. A pastor himself, and chaplain to German soldiers in World War I, he was later dismissed from his post at a German University because of his opposition to the nationalist government. "It is the honor and luck to be the first non-Jewish professor dismissed...", he said later.

Dr. Tillich sees dignity in the revolutionary struggle, "despite his rejection of certain Marxist views." This scholar has been chairman of the Council for Religious Progress from Central Europe and has also been chairman of the Council for Democratic Germany.

Dr. Tillich taught at Union Theological Seminary from 1933 to 1951. He is minister of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and became an American citizen in 1940. For the past four years he has been on the faculty of the Harvard Divinity School.

Harper

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April 9, 1959

Miss Nancy Reed
Publicity Department
The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 Street
New York 19, New York

Dear Miss Reed:

Thank you for letting us read the lectures given at the Museum by Theodore Reik, Paul Tillich, and Harlow Shapley. We were very much interested in them, but cannot fit them in to our editorial schedule for the coming months.

We appreciate your cooperation in sending them to us.

Sincerely,

Cathy S. Silver

Cathy S. Silver
Editorial

Enc.