

# Religion and Culture by Paul Tillich

A digital edition of Paul Tillich's Lecture "Religion and Culture"  
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Now here are two interesting questions. I will try to answer them:

*QN*: If religion cannot be defended on the object-subject level of reality, can there be such a being as apologetics?

*PT*: Now the word "apologetics" can have many meanings, and most Neo-Orthodox theologians are very suspicious of *any* kind of apologetics. I personally would say it depends on the *apologetics*. The word in itself is the highest possible word in theology – a biblical word, and a church-historical word. It means: answering. And if a Christian is not able to answer, then he shouldn't try to make a theology. That is the one answer to it.

But now the next question is what *kind* of apologetics? There the answer is: *not* an apologetic which tries to derive, out of the subject-object structure of reality, the existence of God, or immortality, or other things – this kind of apologetics is not only impossible but it is even an a priori negation of the idea of God, whatever the outcome of such arguments is. The analysis of reality can only lead to the *question* of God – which *means very much* because there is no question without a preceding answer; but it certainly does *not* mean a rational deduction of God out of the world of the finite in which subject-object structure prevails. So the only kind of apologetics which is possible seems to me the development of the question and to point out that the answers involved in the Christian tradition are *real answers* to *real questions*. And this apologetic is nothing else than systematic theology.

Now this was the one [question]. The next question is a little bit too long, but I will try to do it:

*QN* (P.H.John): In his recent book, *Icon and Idea*, Sir Herbert Read says that the history of art and the history of ideas have hitherto been considered as independent aspects of human development, and priority was given to ideas. But he says that in reality the plastic image – or icon – always precedes [the idea. Ideas are but meditations on the intuitions first given visual form by the artist. The icon created by the artist's imagination precedes the verbal structure erected by the philosopher and the scientist on the basis of this aesthetic experience. Religion and philosophy are built on the artist's intuitions. (For example, Greek philosophy is really a meditation based on symmetry, proportion, and harmony – first discovered by artists, painting pots and weaving rugs.) And the architect discovered the dome and the vault and thus gave men the idea of

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infinity, etc. ... – Would you please comment on the above and draw out its implications for the religious life. [The question was drawn from comments on the “jacket” of Read’s book.—*PHJ*]

*PT*: Now that’s a very good question, which is not so much a question as [it is] a supplement to the fundamental method which I have applied in these lectures, showing the expressive power of art for a reality which, without this art, can never be found and certainly cannot be found in terms of cognitive approach.

On the other hand, I think he is only half right in this. And it is interesting that the real example which he gives are the Greeks. Now I come to this immediately – there are a lot of places – when I speak about humanists and Christian education. So I will postpone that for a moment because there the fundamental difference of the genesis of ideas is clear: in Greece it is the transcendent memory; the ideas are *in man*, and must be developed. And then the philosophical and artistic expressions then follow. And I would understand that here, perhaps, in some cases – I wouldn’t make it general – the *artistic* expression *precedes* the philosophical expression. But all such things are usually exaggerations. The more adequate thing seems to me to give absolute priority to the myth, to the mythological fantasy, which has in itself both the artistic, the juristic, and the philosophical element. And it is interesting that *all* of them have developed together, in early Greek philosophy – in Parmenides it is the goddess of right, *diké*, which introduces the philosopher in[to] the vision of being. That means that the different functions were seen in unity, and they were seen mythologically. Now that is my answer to this. And in Christianity the situation is obviously wrongly described because before there were icons, [[there] was the word of Peter, “Thou art the Christ,” [there] was the appearance [406] of the Christ Himself, and His impression on the Disciples and the Christian message. Therefore it is certainly impossible to give to the icons precedence to [i.e. over] the Christian message. But it is possible to give *some* forms of Greek Orthodox initiations and mystical analogies a dependence on the experience they had with the icons. So such statements always must be reduced to their measure – I hope you do that with mine, too!]=*Lecture*

Now I come to another section, namely “*education & religion*.” We finished last time our interpretation of the present world situation and discussed several issues, which I didn’t give in my presentation, in the discussion. We now come to the realm of education, in which a world situation continues itself by communicating its contents to the following generations. In doing so, it produces the basis for other cultural activities. Therefore it is adequate that after the consideration of art and the analysis of the world situation, which is expressed in modern art, we come to the question of how to communicate the contents of our world situation to the following generation, to which partly our present generation also belongs insofar as *every* generation stands between past and future.

What we have to do is to introduce the younger people first, and the older insofar as they are still younger – and I hope many of them are, still – into the situations, traditions, conventions, laws, morals, ideas, and symbols in which we are living. This is an infinite process in every generation, and every individual human being goes deeper into it during his whole life. Therefore education is a continuous reality, not something which is finished when we have left school or have become independent of our parents, but something which is going on to the last day of our life, and is very powerful *in* the last days of one’s life! | [407]

But education is not only the act of introducing, in all the elements of a special historical situation, it is at the same time a help for the development of the moral per-

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sonality and its power of *independent* self-establishment, *within* and if necessary *against* the cultural traditions.

This second is the second form in which man's spiritual functions can be seen. In my lectures on systematic theology Wednesday afternoon – some of you participate in this – I have divided man's spiritual functions into morals as the first, culture, and religion; morals not meaning a system of ethics (this is something else; it belongs to culture and changes with culture), but morals means the self-establishment of the centered moral personality, in acts of decision and destiny, in their interdependence. This is the first function in which we all establish ourselves as persons, as egos in the encounter with the "thou" in a community. Then the second is the creation of cultural contents, the receiving and transforming functions of the human mind – the receiving (you remember I spoke about this, last semester) being the artistic and the cognitive; and the transforming being the ethical, social, political and, between them, educational, which belongs in both of them.

So we now have education as dealing with the establishment of the moral personality, with mediating the cultural contents and, as I will anticipate, leading finally into that which religion means. I will come back to this in this presentation.

Independent of these three functions and serving all three of them are three main ideals of education which I want to name, in a very short-cutting way; the *humanistic*, the *technical*, and the *introductory*. Perhaps the latter we can also call the existential, if you prefer this much-used word now.

So keep these three in mind because we all are, in every moment, in all three of them. But the problems of education arise in the moment in which they come into conflict with each other. I repeat the three: the humanistic, the technical, and the introductory. [408]

The background of the first, to which I turn, are three ideas, of which the Renaissance is the classical period of their development; not classical antiquity, but the Renaissance, because in the Renaissance, elements came in which are dependent on the 1500 years of Christian education and development in this period, and which, in the Greek culture, didn't exist. The three ideas are, first, the idea of the microcosmos. This idea means that every individual man, in his potentialities, mirrors the universe – all levels and dimensions of the universe. They are in him, and he is the mediator from one to the other of these levels. He unites the inorganic, the organic, the animal, and the spiritual levels. All of them are in him. Therefore he has approach to all of them, can control them, and can relate them to each other. Man as the microcosmos represents the universe and is able to develop all the potentialities which are given to him with his [this?] situation. But, and this is the second point, he can and should develop them only as a unique individual. This is *not* Greek. The concept of the microcosmic individual has come to the Renaissance through its Christian underground, through the Christian idea of the infinite value of the individual person in the mind of God. This infinite value of the individual means, in Christianity, that each human being is open to condemnation and salvation, and is of infinite interest to God who looks at him in what he actually is and in what he essentially is and therefore ought to be. The application of the idea of salvation to every individual soul is a Christian idea.

In the Renaissance and then Romanticism, following, the idea is changed. It is combined with the idea of the microcosmos and means the mirroring of the universe goes on differently in every individual. So every individual is a representative of the richness of the divine potentialities which he or she has and nobody else. And this is the second idea: the unique, unrepeatable, once-for-all character of every individual soul. Therefore

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the humanistic idea is the development of one's unique individual potentialities, in the process of one's life. This is the second reason for the humanistic ideal of education. [409]

Then there is a third one: man, because of his central position in the universe, is able to decide autonomously, by the law of the structure of mind and universe which is embodied in him, about the true and the good. Man in the power of his autonomous reason controls world and nature and society. "Autonomous" means: the law is in himself. Please don't misunderstand that word – I must say that now for 50 years, each time, because of the distortion the concept of autonomy has suffered in Neo-Orthodox theology, where it has been identified with individual willfulness. "Autonomous" is, as the Greek word *nomos* indicates, subjection to the law of the universe which is embodied in man and reality as a whole. Autonomy in Kant is just the opposite of willfulness: Kant construes willfulness as heteronomy, as dependent on one's whims, desires, fears, anxiety, etc. That's heteronomy, and that's used by ecclesiastical and political authorities in order to impose *strange* laws, *heteronomous* laws, upon people. Nothing of this is implied in the concept of autonomy.

So we have these three ideas: 1) Man can recognize the law of the universe in himself and in his world. 2) Man is a unique individual, actualizing unique potentialities, irrepeatably [sic.]. 3) And man is the microcosm in whom all the levels and dimensions of reality are united.

This immediately gives to the problem of education a definite content: make actual what is potential in man; help him to come to autonomy; help him to develop his individual potentialities; help him to mirror the universe in his mind.

In the periods in which it was first conceived, this humanistic idea of course demanded, and partly carried through, a very special form of education – the private, aristocratic education, as Rousseau in his *Émile* (and others) demanded, an education in which the educator concentrates all his strength on the full development of one individual who is supposed to become an outstanding representative of the human possibilities in the future society. This is the humanistic education, and many of the great philosophers were teachers in aristocratic houses in which they had to perform this kind of education, and we have aristocrats like Montaigne and Shaftesbury, and others of France and England, who *indeed* were representatives, of highest degree, of human potentialities. [410]

Now the second is the communication of the technical skills to everybody. Out of this idea, which developed a little later than the Renaissance idea, with the rising democratic ideology, we have the concept of the universal public schools – not public schools in the sense of Great Britain, where it simply meant a school in which not only one teacher is in a house to teach the aristocrats, but the sons come together in institutes where you have to be announced a decade before your birth in order to be put in at all! Now this has very little to do with "public" – but in England, you must know that the word "public school" is the highest expression of the most aristocratic form of schools. But, like the other countries, they also introduced schools for everybody. And since the 18th century, for instance in Germany, everybody had to go to these schools. Why? What was the ideal of *this* education? I myself went to such a real public school, where we were together with all workers, and agricultural laborers, and sons of craftsmen and small traders, etc., in a little town. What you first of all learn are technical skills: reading and writing, and beyond this, later on, also schools which bring you nearer to some of your later jobs, as labor or lower middle class people.

But it was not only this. The school was also used in order to give some of the goods of culture. From the very beginning, an element of introduction was envisaged in

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these schools, for instance introduction into nature, the surrounding nature; an introduction into the national |geography and history. But all this was done on the basis of [411] the use of which the state makes of the citizen. And it was very wise to do this because – for instance in military and economic competitions which are going on in Europe day by day – those who had these skills were superior to those who had no skills, and had only the power of a kind of dull resistance but not the power of active progress.

The third form is the introducing idea by active participation in the spirit of a city-state – a *politeia*, as Plato called it – in the spirit of a nation, so that one can participate creatively in it, and not only as a tool, as in the second form; or into a special cultural or religious group. I call this [the] introductory ideal of education, because the decisive thing is that here the group is given, which *precedes* the educational process, and the individual is introduced into it, is brought into its structure, into its symbols, into its activities.

Now let's look at these three ideals, at their importance and their shortcomings. The shortcoming of the first ideal is very obvious in this country, not so obvious in Europe, namely it is the individualistic form, the aristocratic separation of the individual from the total of life in this kind of education. Therefore in the twenties of the century there was a movement in European [sic.] education which called itself neo-humanist, or real humanist, *including* into the education towards humanities in the upper classes, also the education into the social problems of a special social situation. And I myself was partly connected with this idea, that the higher education in Germany, which was thoroughly humanistic, should add and integrate into itself the relationship to the problem of all social classes |and an ability to look on *this* basis into the humanistic values with a new [412] eye. And we *performed* this, to a certain extent – it was possible to understand what happens in Greece or in Rome *much* better in the light of the conflicts of the social situation in the twenties and, before that, in Germany and Europe generally.

Nevertheless the shortcoming remained, namely the limitation to upper classes. And how strong this limitation was, I only learned when I came to this country, where the opposite difficulty seems to prevail.

The second, [education] for skills, has a danger that it becomes an education of adjustment. And it is not by chance that it was invented by the absolute state – the absolute state which wanted to have skillful soldiers and skillful industrial population. Absolutism introduced, from above, industrial activities into the respective countries, and of course it needed people who were able to be taught the activities they had to perform in the context both of the military and the industrial activities, and in the higher form also of some low administrative activities. The higher administration was still in the hands of those who were educated humanistically.

I say the danger of this education is that it becomes an education to adjustment. Adjustment has two meanings: to overcome a-social tendencies which are simply negative, in a pupil; and to introduce the pupil into the norms and conventions of a given society. The danger is that while the teachers, especially in this country, try to adjust the children into the necessities of life, the unconditional necessities – not to become an outlaw, etc., which is right – *they also* adjust to the conventions and take away from them the possibility to say No to *any* convention, |in the power of a higher principle. This I would [413] call the negative concept of an education of adjustment. If we use that term, “education for adjustment,” then we should always read Huxley's Brave New World in order to see where we can avoid producing “gamma's” in our school's, namely that lowest class of workers which is produced en masse by special means of stimulus and response, and

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conditioned reflexes. This is of course a caricature, but the caricature can become a symbol for a tendency. And I am very much afraid that Huxley was right when he wrote this caricature, that this tendency of the production of gamma's and beta's and alpha's of course – of which the most important is the production of “gamma's” who say “We are proved to be gamma's,” namely the lowest – and to take away the attempt to go beyond the lowest by saying No!

Now I only indicate this danger because I believe, with all the other conformist tendencies which come from radio, movie, newspapers, television, etc., there is a real danger of a total adjustment of adjustment (in the second sense of the word) which indeed would finally destroy itself because the creative spirit would be driven out. This is the limit of *this* ideal.

Then the third ideal is introducing into groups the meaning of which is expressed in sets of symbols, doctrines, and perhaps dogmas. Introduction is the interpretative introduction into these concepts, doctrines and symbols. This is not necessarily the same as the second is. The education of adjustment could be described as patternization, subjection to a pattern. The third can be described as conformism, to introduce into a group with which one conflicts, without being modelled according to a pattern. But of course there is a similar problem in this introductory type, namely [the problem [of] how [414] to find a way of giving, by introducing the contents of such a group, without destroying the possibility of developing this group – and you cannot develop *anything* whatsoever without being able to say No! – to be subjected to norms which you put *against even* the symbols of this group. This is of course a basically Protestant attitude in a conformist group of society.

Now we have in this way all three of them in their necessities, their dangers and their shortcomings. There are different agencies which are responsible for these three and use them predominantly. Obviously the first one, the humanistic education, is dependent on the house and its traditions – aristocratic – and the private teacher and his genius, and of course the possibility of the pupil to *be* developed to an all-embracing human actualization of his potentialities. The second is predominantly a matter of school and later on of the early apprentice work-communities. The third one is an introduction into the symbols and therefore is dependent on the bearers of these symbols, of the leaders of this group, of the institutions – for instance parades of representatives of a party, if it is a real social group; or religious services and processions. All this belongs to the third form of education. They *take in* those who are not yet in, and they strengthen the participation of those who *are* in. And this is the education which one can call education by existential participation. I had the experience in the twenties that the younger generation of Germany was absolutely dedicated to *this* form of education, against both of the others. I myself belonged to the enlarged humanistic education, not in terms of a teacher in the house [but in terms of [415] these comparatively few institutions which in Germany are called Gymnasia, and where, for nine years, you have every week at least four to six hours Latin and equally many Greek. Now on this basis you are able to develop that ideal of full humanity of which the Renaissance believed that the Greeks and Romans had developed it in a unique way.

But not only the pupils coming from the Gymnasia had a feeling of emptiness, of irresponsibility, by taking in these materials without having them really related to their actual life; but it was also in the public school, the *lack of meaning* in this kind of education-to-skills. The little meaning given by patriotic songs and others, which you could use or did not use – that didn't matter – didn't give a content of life. And the churches were almost non-existent for the masses of *people* in Europe – i.e. Central Europe, not

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England, in all these discussions, except when I mention it especially.

Now in this situation the totalitarian *movements* suddenly came before the totalitarian governments come. And these were largely youth movements, movements in which the younger generation wanted to find a demanding unconditional meaning of life to which they would subject themselves, which imposed heavy duties upon them, and that's what they wanted to have in opposition to liberal democracy, which in Germany was much more liberal than in this country and which gave no contents whatsoever for the individual, so that he had to decide as an isolated individual person.

Now this is the situation in which the third way became visible to all of us – and when I gave my lecture[s] (I think I did it twice) in Frankfurt on the Main, shortly before the Nazis came, [on what was called in German Sozialpädagogik, social pedagogy, then [416] the pattern which we had in mind when we gave such lectures was the desire of the whole younger generation for subjection to strong authoritarian demands, in which the burden of decision and the emptiness of contents is taken away from them. They were seeking for every price, [i.e. at any] and *they paid the price*, for security, spiritual security, not economic. And this spiritual security was given them in a quasi- demonic way, or in a demonic quasi-religious way, by the totalitarian movements, both Communist and Fascist, which fought against each other on the streets and in the soul of every individual. And partly this was also, at that time and after the War, the great attraction of the Roman Church where they had to subject themselves to similar total demands, to heteronomous laws against their humanistic autonomy, but on the other hand got the security of a tightly-knit system of symbols, which was *very rich* and not destroyed by criticism.

Now this is the third form. Here the school is important, and here the *house* [i.e. home] was not important – at least not definitively important – but those groups into which the young people were driven, the “gang,” if you want an American word. But it was more than a gang; a gang usually does not have a thoroughly developed ideology – but these totalitarian groups had it.

This induces me to say a few words about the overestimating of the school, in American education. It is an interesting thing that if you hear the word “educator,” you always think of presidents of big schools, colleges, high schools, etc. – they are *the* educators of this country. [This is not even true of their own schools, where they are first of all [417] administrators and then *sometimes* one of them has also some educational ideas. [some laughter] But it is certainly *not* true, in no way true, of the general situation of education in this country. There are other powers much more important, [just] as in Europe before the totalitarian movements came. And the first is the [home] : the [home] was able to give hidden resistance – hidden; open was impossible – to its own system, even in totalitarian systems. Not open – because the children would go to the next Gauleiter and would accuse their parents, under Nazism; but hidden, by the very existence of the [home], by the reality, which is always reality of introduction, and the introduction into the [home] starts with birth and is therefore the most important one.

Then there are also in this country other powers – of course the churches – and the representatives of the political ideas about which fight is going on. And then very important – and that, all teachers should know – the gang, in the largest sense of the word. I have been educated in *very* important respects by a Christian fraternity to which I belonged in Germany – for a lifetime, that is, of course, but decisively for four or five years. And there, those students who were a little bit older, one or two years older, were the *real* authorities – we didn't care very much about the professors in comparison with the older students – and I think you do the same!

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Now here you have a very large concept of education, and the *title* (“educators”) should be applied to all of them. Now a little more about this Thursday.