

# Religion and Culture by Paul Tillich

A digital edition of Paul Tillich's Lecture "Religion and Culture"  
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I have received a very nice but unfortunately unfeasible request, namely to add a few hours to the ordinary hours, of which we have only five – today and the next two weeks, two hours each. And there are some mathematical calculations that these hours do not completely agree with the program I gave you in the beginning. Now it is not as bad as it seems to be because some of these points can be discussed together in one more embracing discussion. On the other hand, I talked it over with Mr. Leibrecht and we agreed that it will be absolutely impossible – not only relatively, but absolutely [laughter] – to find an hour in which the whole class will be able to come, outside the ordinary hours which are reserved for it. So I am sorry I cannot accept this suggestion, but I feel very much moved by it to intensify the presentation and to concentrate a little bit more than I did perhaps in the last hours.

The problem we have discussed was individual ethics. I gave you a discussion of the different types of individualism, and then we came to the concept of person, personality, and the different meanings of the second word in different languages. In the meantime, I have learned that there is another use of the word personality, introduced by the psychology of personality, the idea of personality structure. Since this structure already has its roots in the baby period of human beings, one could speak of the "personality" of a baby. Now this means the word personality has become useless, and if we want to use it we must always say which of these different meanings we will use. |

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I use here the term "the ideal of personality." I don't mean it in the sense of personality structure, and I *don't* mean it in the sense of person, as someone who is legally protected, or who potentially has the possibility to *become* a personality, but I mean it in the sense of a developed character on the basis of an individual being. This ideal of personality has developed under the impact both of the Reformation and of the Renaissance. It has shown some characteristics of which we must say that it is one of the greatest and perhaps most catastrophic developments in our modern period.

To understand that, we must distinguish the idea of personality and the ideal of personality. The idea of personality simply means that man is created to be a person, on the basis of a completed individualized self, and to develop, on this basis, those characteristics which we attribute to a personality – a character, a special direction of life, special insights, special experiences, which make him a being who represents actually a human possibility whereby, on an individual basis, universal meanings are embodied,

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incarnated, impregnated and actualized. The phrase would be “He is a personality.” But of another man we would say “He is no personality.” Certainly he is a person – I cannot kill him as I can an animal. But he is not a personality. On the basis of his personal potentialities, he has nothing developed which makes him a real personality, a concentrated will, an educational form, a participation in universals, in thought and action. That’s what I would call a personality. – This is the *idea* of personality.

Out of this the *ideal* of personality has developed, in consequence of Reformation and of Renaissance, and *especially* in consequence of Calvinist Reformation, much more than the [Lutheran; and in consequence, of Cartesian development of the Renaissance, namely [448] the philosophy of consciousness.

On this basis an ideal of personality has appeared which looks like this: the individual is a strong, directed character, dependent on the universal structures of reality; dependent in religion, in Protestantism, on the divine law; dependent, in humanism, on the law of reason, determined by it, self-controlled, conscious and suppressive, namely suppressing those elements in oneself which are given on the basis of our vital existence, repressing the dynamics of vitality, and cutting off the relationship not only to one’s own vital and unconscious tendencies and realities, but also to the others and also to nature as a whole. This ideal of personality you find in these two developments: in the later development of Calvinism and in the later development of bourgeois society.

Now let us think a little about the implications of this idea of personality which is still alive in some parts of your own conscience, and which on the other hand is in the process of explosion. And out of this double fact – that it is still present and that it is not really accepted any more – most of the disturbing consequences of the present situation have arisen. One of ths [sic.] these consequences is the immense increase in mental disease, or at least mental distortedness. This morning I went through the mail of a few days, with my secretary, and as *always*, when we do this, there are a few letters where she immediately tells me, “I suppose this belongs into the folder of ‘Crazy People.’” – and this folder is increasing. [laughter] Now but this is terrible! I am really appalled, each time this happens, by the proportion of healthy letters to crazy letters [which one gets [449] in one week. Now what does this mean? This means that something is going wrong with the ideal of personality as it has been carried through in Protestantism and humanism, and in the alliance of these two in many Protestant groups, and in many secular groups too. What is wrong with it? My answer is: In spite of the greatness of the *idea* of personality, the *ideal* of personality is a distinction of this ideal [idea?]. Man indeed is in his structural essence determined to *become* a personality, to use his individual basis (with vitality, community and nature in him and around him) to impregnate it with forms and meanings. That is his destiny. For that, he is determined; but on the other hand, what has happened is that this concentrated, conscious, self- controlling personality has suppressed and cut off the relationship to the basis on which it has arisen.

Let us first look at nature, the relationship of man and nature. This relationship is, in types of Protestantism and type of humanism, a relationship of control and nothing but this. Religiously speaking, the Renaissance idea of the infinite being-present in the finite, of *every* finite – nature and history – has been transformed into the idea of a kingdom of God, or a will of God, or a law of reason, which is in opposition to the natural powers, and demands their suppression. Now first, this was very much in the line with the analysis I gave about the status of industrial society, in the period of history in which we are living. Nature *means* a tool, but not an end in itself, not a mirror of the divine potentialities in every atom and in every plant and animal. This is denied as European romanticism, and

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since romanticism has become a name-calling word – [although, as Karl Barth says, we all [450] are romantics by nature (he means, by history) [some laughter] – it is regrettable that the *true* meaning of romanticism, namely its heritage from the Renaissance vision of reality as the self-manifestation of the Divine, has been lost so much and, instead of that, this theistic or rationalistic dualism which suppresses the natural and makes it exclusively a means for human ends. Are we still able, and if so, to what degree, to contemplate quietly, natural realities – not only taking a car and running through it [i.e. nature] and having swimming and other exercises, if we don't prefer to read the New York Times, sitting in a beautiful place – are we able to contemplate the power of being in natural phenomena? Or is the dynamics of the gadgets, of the means-for-ends which again are the means for other ends, etc., so powerful upon our lives (now I speak here against myself) that we are not able any more to have this intuitive relationship to the divine depths which we also find in nature? And it is interesting that the creators of modern science, and today again some of the great scientists, try to make us understand that their work is – just as Kepler said when he discovered the ways of the planets – that this is a description of the divine Glory, and that for this reason he wants to give this.

Now, is the ideal of personality not a way of cutting us off from the nature beside us, as a manifestation of the ultimate which *speaks* to us, and in which we are enriched in an encounter, by power of being, expressing the ground of being in itself and for us? – That is the first question.

The second is with respect to other beings. No, let me introduce another thing which has to do with nature, before I come to the human – namely the technical forming of nature. [It is what Prof. [Herbert] Marcuse, in his book which I quoted already in [451] the beginning of these lectures, [called] Eros and Civilization – the lack of eros in our relationship to work and the products of our work, to which he draws, very intensively, our attention. One can have eros towards work, and if one has this, a chair one makes can be a symbol of ultimately eternal meaning, by the form which it gets, which is not only honest – determined by the purpose – but also an image of the proportions according to which the universe itself is created. And if these proportions are used and not a reminiscence of Baroque trimmings, destroy[ing] the whole meaning of that – because there is no eros any more, one takes as trimming the eros of former periods. But this is worse! The eros of our time would be to do honestly what one is asked to do, namely to make a good chair or a good table. And if our time does it, I have observed that the eros returns. An honest piece of modern furniture, if it is done without trimming and without dependence on past forms, is a work in which meaning is embodied, which *speaks* to us, and if we come to such a room, then we are spoken at immediately.

Now that is another side of the ideal of personality which has *ruined* our relationship to the technical transformation of reality. And as some of you know, I feel the worst of this is if this dishonest method is applied to religious art, church buildings, church furniture and other things, and the whole realm of religious art. [The] lack of eros [is] replaced by the forms created by the great eros of the past, which if we simply copy it, we make it into an object [about] which we *cannot* feel anything of what former centuries felt about what *they* did, about their eros relationship. | [452]

Then let us go to community. I will go to this further on more fully, but the individual personality has become the *lonely* personality, and finally, since loneliness cannot be stood, “the lonely crowd,” who goes into the group, into the crowd, where he tries to overcome his loneliness but is not able to, and so he returns, or very often feels even more lonely in the crowd, and what is lacking, what former periods had – and what I

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indicated when I spoke of contemplation of nature – that is solitude. Without solitude, man is crippled. And the idea of personality has very much to do with the crippling of man on the basis of his being without solitude. The further problems connected with this relation, I will discuss in connection with social ethics.

I now come to one's self, namely the cutting off of one's self. Here I want to jump to one of the sections which I have under No. 17, family and sex relationships. In the idea of personality, not only the relationship to nature, and the eros to the objects of our work – and therefore to the work itself – but also the relationship to ourselves insofar as something is not brought into the conscious willing, deciding center, is cut off. The concept of self-controlling is certainly a concept which is needed in many special situations; he who has not self-control can never become a centered personality, and that belongs to the formation of man to become this. But if he pays for this, being a centered personality, the price of cutting himself off from the vital dimension of his being, from that which today is predominantly called the unconscious, or the subconscious or the vital, then that phenomenon comes into existence which we call repression. Repression can last for a certain time. It is often a matter of one or two generations. But it cannot last forever [because man remains man, even if Queen Victoria demands him to be not man! [little laughter] And therefore, suddenly, sporadically and then generally, the revolt of the repressed seeps up and becomes powerful. But now the situation is the following: this revolt is still under the pressure of the suppressing commandments of the ideal of personality. Therefore it is done with passion, but not always with good conscience. The conscience represents not in itself a divine or rational command, but it represents the symbols of the Victorian period. Therefore it produces a bad conscience about the acceptance of vitality generally. On the other hand, the power of that which is repressed is so strong that it breaks through and forces revolt with bad conscience. Now this is my main analysis of the state of mind in the present and the little bit preceding generation – perhaps more even the preceding than the present. All this is a consequence of the ideal of personality. [453]

The question now arises: what, in the different forms, can help us to overcome this ideal of personality which is equally supported by religion and by humanism? Very often – and maybe you have learned this from these lectures – the answer “religion” is not answer at all, because religion has entered the same transformations which we find in the general culture. Whether [it is] repression by the Ten Commandments and their interpretation in Protestant preaching and indoctrination, from earliest days on – or whether the demands of a secularpuritan rationality, as we find it in Kantianism – doesn't make any difference. And the one is not the solution for the other. Ultimately the secular repressive powers are only secularized religious powers from which they finally come. | [454]

Now in this situation, certainly the answer is not religion – and this is very often so. But the answer might perhaps be something else, named, “God,” or “the Ultimate,” or “that which *transcends* the law, of repression.” It may be that which in religion is called “grace,” or the power which overcomes the conflict between the law and the reality of our being, [which] can overcome repression without the dangerous and disease-producing explosions which we see in our younger generation so often, and in older men even (not more often but almost equally often) if they come from the generation of repression.

Now this means that only one thing can overcome it, namely a power of being which gives fulfillment of the *idea* of personality in such a way that the *totality* of our being is included, and the *totality* of nature outside and inside of us is included, and the eros towards other men is included.

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Now how this can happen is another question. It can happen if we are open for it, because there is healing power in reality. You can even find it in churches. You can also find it in the latent church, which is often in opposition to the manifest church. You can find it even in those who seem to be libertinists and complete despisers of any law. You can find it even in those who are on the edge of mental distortion. There is such healing power present in reality. The old name of this healing power is *charis*, or *gratia* – grace, which is still a good word in English and which means the possibility of having a being in which the law of suppression is not valid any more; in which the so to speak living connections between the unconscious and the conscious, between the controlling will and the natural desires, are kept open. Now obviously, in saying all this, [I am now  
[455] very near to the psychopathological problematic, which we have discussed at the end of the first semester. What the psychoanalysts tried to do – if you take that word in the largest sense – is just this, namely to open up what is cut off by the ideal of personality, as it has developed in Protestantism and humanism, and of course [has] largely grasped, especially in this country, also the Catholic section of this country and, even more than the Protestant, the Jewish section of this country.

Now in all these groups we have a strong development of the ideal of personality, and for this reason something has happened which is characteristic for it: the more the personality ideal was predominant, the more psychoanalysis was needed. It is *least* needed in Roman Catholic sections; it is *most* needed, at least statistically, in Jewish groups; and again nearer to it, in Protestant groups. This means that this picture [?], which makes the situation especially clear, cut off from the vital sources of life by the commandments which come from the law, be it humanistic or religious. [??] This is the reason for a large amount of mental disease, or of chaotic explosion which may ruin the personality definitively, if he is not able to overcome the chaos; and very often, after he has gone through the chaos, he returns to another protection by obedience to an even more repressive law.

Now these developments are so frequent that I believe the analyst and the minister and the counselor – who is every Protestant, in Protestantism – should help the other one to find the approach to his vital sources without the tremendous anxiety which is produced if the norms of repression are still alive in a person. | [456]

This brings me to a point to which I referred: family and sex. Most of these things are produced *not directly* by ministers, churches, public opinion, but the *seeds* almost always go back to the family, because in the family situation the first forming attempts are made and are more successful than any other later attempt for education – we should never forget this. It is not because [of] the special form of family life, it is not the bourgeois ideal of family life, with the authoritarian father (in Europe) and the authoritarian mother (in America) [laughter], but it is a natural structure, namely the immense dependence of the child, in earliest months and years, on the parents or their representatives. Therefore the forming power of the family relation is tremendous.

Now in the family relation there are also implied the sex relations, first between the parents and then between the parents and the children, in the way in which depth psychology has described that, to a great extent, the suppressive power of the parents, if it is the mother, preventing the sons from going to other women, to easily become homosexuals, to become unable to love another woman, because the bondage which is partly based on the authority situation, partly based on the sex-relationship of the son to the mother, is so strong that many, many – I know *so* many psycho- analysts in this country, and the unanimous experience of them, whatever their theoretical attitude

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besides it is that the ruin of so many good boys – potentially good and able to develop their good potentialities – is the bondage to a dominating mother and the *inability* to get away from it.

Now this of course can be enlarged to the father and the daughter, where we have very similar situations. And all these situations demand a complete revision, in the light of these discoveries, [of both Christian and Protestant sex ethics, and family ethics. [457]

First family ethics: The authoritarian family is a bourgeois invention, which in this way was not valid in former centuries. There we had the feudal authority, which completely transcended the family authority. In the bourgeois realm, the authority of the family developed, and all the consequences to which I referred. This is not the answer although it always remains the most important part of human relations because of the situation between parents and children. It is not, in the form in which we have it today, the answer. Which the answer is, is the problem of the development in which we are. But one thing is clear: *mere permissiveness* doesn't help to overcome the impact of the parents because permissiveness often produces an even stronger bondage and takes away one good thing which authoritarian attitudes bring, namely the possibility of revolt. The tremendous permissiveness – I spoke about that already in educational context – towards the children doesn't liberate them but brings them very soon into the bondage of social convention, where they have not the power any more to revolt because the pressure was not great enough, and the slow way of subjection is perhaps more dangerous for conformism than a real pressure.

And also the sex ethics must be revised, and are in the process of being revised, in view of this situation. The first and decisive thing is that sex must be affirmed as created goodness, as eating and drinking and walking and enjoying nature and enjoying friendship. It is as natural and as divine as all these other things. And the veil of anxiety connected with it should be *torn to pieces*. It should be *not* a matter of shame, but a matter of glory. This is one thing, [and perhaps the first and most important thing. The [458] main question is not better rules – they would be rules again – but the main question is: better relationship of this power of man and nature to the Ultimate; to see it in its created goodness and not in the distorted state in which the later ancient world has brought it, producing then the ascetic reaction which crept into Christianity and which has no basis in the genuine Jewish-Christian tradition; neither in the Old nor in the New Testament is there a real basis for the creeping of ancient asceticism and negation of sex into Christianity. This is the first point.

The second point is: the *function* of the sexual. Here the great fight is going on between a modern Protestant view and the Catholic and partly old Protestant view, namely that the meaning of sex is the production of the following generation, and that it is justified *only* for purposes of propagation and has no justification at all beyond this. Now in this fight there is no doubt where Protestantism has to stand – and humanism stands there mostly anyhow, today – namely on the side of those who say there is a double function of sex: the fulfillment of all vital potentialities, in moments of ecstasy, in which the differentiation of body and body is overcome; and at the same time the propagation and the creation of children, of new life. The unity of these two and the possibility of separating them under many circumstances is the basic answer which we *have* to give against the laws of repression which had been put upon mankind in the later part of bourgeois society and Calvinist Protestantism.

Now this is my preliminary answer to this. It is not a lecture in ethics, but it is a lecture in culture and religion. And as always in these lectures, I repeat: the problem

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of sex is *not* resolved |by saying “Go from humanism or naturalism to religion,” but the [459]  
answer is “Stay where you are, but go into the depth-dimension, the dimension of the  
Ultimate, which is, as the source of creation*and* of *grace, beyond* the repressivepower of  
the ideal of personality.