

Paul Tillich: Exploring the Relationship Between Religion and Culture

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Introduction

1. Tillich's method of correlation insists on formulating the questions raised by contemporary culture accurately in content and form and answering them with the resources of the Christian tradition rooted in the scriptures.
2. The Millennial Generation forms an important segment of U.S. culture today, influencing youth around the world as well as their parents and grandparents. Around 80 million young people born in the 1990s and first part of the 21st century.
3. **Some helpful books:** *Theology of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1959). A collection of insightful essays on various topics such as psychoanalysis, art, existentialism and education; *Systematic Theology*, three vol. in one (University of Chicago Press, 1967). A great summary work which consistently explains the Christian message as a response to real human concerns; *The Courage to Be* (Yale University Press, 1952). A brilliant analysis of modern forms of anxiety and some creative Christian responses; *The New Being* (Scribners, 1955). A fine collection of challenging sermons which provide a great entry into Tillich's thought.

I. His Life

A. Facts

1. Born in 1886 in the province of Brandenburg, Germany – the son of a very strict Prussian Lutheran pastor
2. 1900 age 14 moved to Berlin
3. 1903 (age 17) his mother died, causing an identity crisis and periods of anxiety. He was very close to his mother.
4. 1911 (age 25) he received his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin
5. 1912 (age 26) ordained a Lutheran pastor
6. 1914-1918 army chaplain (read *The Idea of the Holy* by Rudolf Otto, 1917)
7. 1919-1933 taught philosophy and theology at various German universities (Berlin, Marburg, Dresden, Leipzig, Frankfurt); 1925 with Heidegger at Marburg
8. 1933 emigrated to the U.S.; he wrote the *Socialist Decision* in 1933 right after Hitler and the Nazis came to power, causing him to lose his teaching post at Frankfurt.
9. 1933-1955 professor at Union Theological in New York
10. 1955-1962 professor at Harvard
11. 1962-1965 professor at the University of Chicago
12. Died October 22, 1965 at the age of 79

B. His own self-interpretation is in terms of living on a boundary between two opposing elements, "to stand between alternative possibilities of existence, to be completely at home in neither and to take no definite stand against either." This is fruitful for thought, but dangerous (cf *On the Boundary*).

1. Between several classes – he belonged to the privileged class but liked to hang around with the lower class and the Bohemians; produced guilt and his book, *Religious Socialism*
2. Between Reality and Imagination – he loved to play and developed a great appreciation for visual arts; liked later poetry of Rilke
3. Between Theory and Practice – dedicated to intellectual life but got involved in politics and religious Socialism
4. Between Heteronomy and Autonomy
5. Between Philosophy and Theology – his philosophy of religion tries to express the experience of the abyss in philosophical terms and to develop the theological notion of justification that before God the sinner is just
6. Between Germany and the U.S.A. – at first he thought only in Germany was there a real effort to synthesize Christianity and the modern mind and in the U.S. the drive was for practicality. There is a

final boundary between the finite individual and that which transcends all human possibilities. This is symbolized in the meeting of the sea and the land (Armbruster p. 19).

C. Rollo May's impressions of his book *Paulus*

1. Tillich as a teacher possessed universality (wide ranging interests and comprehensive knowledge of history), depth (interest in the most significant questions, thoughts really mattered, took hold of one personally, invited one to further reflection).
2. He had a great ability to be present to people and situations. His emotions always showed. Despite his presence which grasped and overwhelmed others, he himself always seemed lonely.
3. He was very close to his mother who died when he was 17, setting up great anxiety which remained with him all his life. He was not an "adjusted person" but like a man on a bicycle who can maintain balance only by constant forward movement (p. 45). His great devotion to women was a search for his lost mother.
4. He had a mystical sense of the abyss or holy void which gave an open-minded base for all his rational efforts. Thus he preferred dark Romanesque churches, gray days, living on the boundary. In spite of this he demonstrated great courage, wrote about it (*The Courage to Be*) and freed others to face their own problems.
5. Tillich will not be appreciated in our anxious and alienated age but will be re-discovered because he begins with man's questions, stressed meaning as the basis for values and saw the danger of exclusive religious attitudes.
6. He spoke freely and directly of death as the ultimate symbol of our finiteness. He spoke of resurrection rather than of immortality.
7. Tillich never made disciples of people, but co-workers.
8. May recognizes Tillich's erotic attraction to women, his ability to "penetrate women with his eyes and voice." Often more sensual than sexual.

A. Some of Tillich's ideas - Theology is the systematic interpretation of the Christian faith for the human situation.

1. Kerygmatic theology (Barth, for example) stresses the unchanging character of the Christian message.
2. Answering or apologetic theology listens to the questions in the culture and looks for common ground between message and situation (Tillich's own approach).

B. Ultimate Concern. "There is an immediate experience of something ultimate in value and being of which one can become intuitively aware". It is the formulation of the great commandment to love God totally and as exemplified by Mary rather than Martha. A concern is ultimate only when it demands total surrender and promises total fulfillment. It is unconditional, total and infinite.

C. The norm for theological reflection is "the new Being in Jesus as the Christ as our ultimate concern". The norm is derived from the Bible, produced in the church, conditioned by culture and verified by experience (Armbruster, p. 30).

D. Method of Correlation. Opposed to supernaturalism, which simply gives Christian answers, and to naturalism which finds answers only in the culture. His method is to probe the human situation in its cultural expressions for questions and to show how the symbols of the Christian message answer these questions using the forms or language supplied by the culture.

E. Relation of theology and philosophy. "Theology deals existentially with the meaning of being; philosophy deals theoretically with the structure of being" (STI, p. 230). Still they are also similar in that the philosopher is motivated by ultimate concern and the theologian needs detachment from the situation.

F. The relation between essence, existence and salvation. Essence is the ideal way a reality should be, existence is the actual estranged life we know, salvation is the healing of the splits or problems of existence.

G. The Protestant Principle criticizes deviations in the church based on the scripture that witnesses to the New Being established by Christ. The **Catholic substance**, including the sacramental system, supplies the actual experience of the presence of the New Being.

II. Theology of Culture

A. Biographical

1. He served as a chaplain in the German army during World War I and was emotionally affected by the carnage. He had two emotional breakdowns.
2. Visited the Art Museum in Berlin during a furlough and had a spiritual experience viewing a Botticelli *Madonna*. After the war, he visited many museums looking for emotional healing through art.
3. In 1919 (age 32) gave a lecture on the Idea of the Theology of Culture that set the stage for his whole life work, culminating in his three volume *Systematic Theology*.
4. Found authoritarian approaches oppressive, including his domineering father and the Catholic hierarchy.
5. Wrote *Religious Socialism* in the 1920s, a failed effort to find a middle ground between capitalism and socialism.
6. Last lecture in 1965, spoke positively about world religions and the need to redo his whole *Systematic Theology*.

B. Main Ideas

1. "Culture is the form of religion and religion is the substance of culture". Religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture. Culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself.
2. Theonomy which opposes the autonomy of the culture and the heteronomy of Church dominating cultures. It suggests a fruitful interaction between religion and culture in which God is the supreme norm. This preserves the good in secular culture by rooting it in its religious depth. The transcendent is in the immanent. Theology brings to light "the concealed religious experience embedded in all great cultural phenomena." We can speak of "a theonomous attitude or sensibility." Religion must respect the proper autonomy of secular disciplines like science. Theonomy is really a divine call in which we participate. Tillich saw no direct conflict between Athens and Jerusalem, faith and reason. He opposed a shallow autonomy disconnected from its religious depth. There is a proper Christian humanism concerned for human dignity and fulfillment.
3. Estrangement. This is the condition of humanity as it really exists and not as its ideal essence should be. This is represented by the biblical image of the Fall and the notion of original sin. All sin can be seen as a form of estrangement from God, others and self. Estrangement is overcome by the new God-man relationship established by Jesus the Christ who is the New Being. Picasso's *Guernica* is the great artistic expression of modern estrangement.
4. Belief-ful Realism vs. technological realism which sees things only in terms of usefulness and mystical realism which involves an excessive devotion to contemplation. He came to put great emphasis on the historical process (Marx) and the present moment (Kairos) for meeting God. "Faith is reason in ecstasy." Idolatrous faith (making an ultimate out of a preliminary concern) leads to disappointment and personality problems.

III. The Millennials

A. Demographics

1. There are about 80 million millennials in the United States who grew up in the 1990s and the early parts of the 21st century.
2. They are the largest generation of youth in history.

B. Characteristics

1. They are the least overtly religious American generation in modern times; 1 in 4 say they are unaffiliated with any religion.
2. Many claim that they are spiritual but not religious.
3. They are more conscious of environmental problems.
4. They are big on voluntary service. More than half of workers in their 20s prefer employment at companies that provide volunteer opportunities.
5. They are strongly individualistic and are often involved in a search for meaning on their own.

6. They are the first generation to be constantly connected to one another through the web -- social media, smart phones, e-mails, texting – thus their private lives have become public.
7. Hook-up sex involves no relationships or communication or emotional fulfillment and often occurs under the influence of alcohol. Many students do not find these arrangements fulfilling.
8. Millennials have great freedom to travel, to adopt various religious practices or none. Some say they have great freedom of choice but do not feel that they themselves are chosen, and thus have the responsibility to make good choices.

C. Catholic Millennials

1. They continue to hold fundamental beliefs of their faith: over 90% believe in God and practice some kinds of prayer and affirm the Divinity of Christ, and believe that at Mass the bread and wine become His body and blood. They put emphasis on practicing the works of charity.
2. They hold fundamental beliefs of the second Vatican Council: the important role of the laity, participation in the liturgy, the value of religious liberty, and the importance of interfaith and ecumenical dialogue. They hold these positions even without an explicit knowledge of Vatican II.
3. The categories of liberal and conservative do not apply very well to young Catholics today.
4. They suffer from the demise of the Catholic subculture. Their world appears more fragmented, chaotic and discontinuous. This means that their spiritual quest includes a desire for stability and security.

D. Types according to spiritual concerns: secular, eclipsed, private, ecumenical, prophetic, sacramental, evangelical.

IV. Tillichian Response to Millennial Groups with Diverse Spiritualities (cf A lecture given by Fred Parrella in Paris, May 24, 2013 on Tillich and the Millennial Generation).

A. Secular

1. A young woman involved in the hook-up culture finds it leaves her disillusioned and unfulfilled. Is there a better way of relating and finding a life partner?
2. Danger: making an idol out of sexual pleasure; apathy about relationships; loss of erotic energy
3. Response: cf *Love and Will* by Rollo May. Separating love and sex retards psychological development and leads to apathy and loss of erotic desire. Sex loses its romance and meaning. Separating emotion from reason leads to seeking pleasure rather than union (lust). Commercialization of sex and pornography contributes to the split between love and sex. What appears as sexual freedom is really enslaving. The alternative is to root sexual activity in committed, faithful relationships, to gradually deepen a relationship. Sexual drive should be linked with eros (desire of union), philia (friendly care), and agape that enables us to see the other as God sees them in their unique goodness. This brings back romance, excitement of discovery and highlights care for the other. Sex involves gratification and release of tension; eros is “a desiring, longing, a forever reaching out, seeking to expand.” Love opens us to suffering as well as joy.
4. Tillich struggled with sexuality. His son Rene (a psychotherapist) in a 1998 lecture at Harvard said his father deeply loved Hannah his wife for over 40 years and that they agreed at the beginning to be free to have extramarital sex, which they both did. Hannah exaggerated his affairs in her book *From Time to Time*. Paul did not want a divorce because he loved Hannah, who had her own emotional problems. Rollo May says Tillich’s fascination with woman was more sensual than sexual.

B. Eclipsed

1. Question: Why should I be interested in spiritual matters?
2. Danger: estrangement from true self and making an idol out of worldly pursuits; overwhelmed by suffering.
3. Response: Only God can be our ultimate concern. God as Ultimate Concern, Ground of Being and Spiritual Presence is the answer to question of meaning.
4. Tillich’s WWI experience as a chaplain for four years on the front lines, comforting the wounded and burying the dead. World of art revealed to him the God who is present in the world of suffering symbolized by the cross.

C. Private

1. Question: Why should I be involved in a church or community of faith? I am happy with my computer and texting others. I am growing spiritually on my own. I am spiritual but not religious.
2. Danger: following faddish or one-sided spiritual approaches; making an idol out of our own spiritual interests
3. Response: The Protestant Principle reminds us that Churches can be authoritarian and stifles the Spirit. On the other hand, the Church keeps alive the memory of Christ the New Being who guides our spiritual growth. Matters of ultimate concern do seek expression.
4. Tillich's struggle to free himself from the rigid Christianity of his father and coming to terms with the church. His critique of modern technology, which is essentially ambivalent; it can be demonic when it becomes an idol, but it has great power to create community. Problems come when technological advances are tied to economic interests or military purposes. It is not helpful to have a nostalgic longing for a simpler age. Social media helped the revolution in Egypt. The computer makes knowledge equally available. Large data helps us detect social trends. Technology helps science serve human need. It can take on a life of its own and elude rational control. Beware of the electronic moat and lack of personal contact.

D. Evangelical

1. I want to share my faith with others. How can I do this more effectively?
2. Danger: proclaiming the Christian message as timeless truth without taking into account historical development and the changing situation into account; making an idol out of traditional dogmatic formulations.
3. Response: Apply the method of correlation that tries to understand the questions being asked today and try to reinterpret Christian doctrines as responses to the real questions. Church members must show secularized people that the Christian symbols are answers to their deepest search for meaning and unity.
4. Tillich's 3 volume *Systematic Theology* is an attempt to make the Christian revelation credible and intelligent to the modern world.

E. Ecumenical

1. Question: How can Catholics and Protestants become united in one church?
2. Danger: simplistic approaches that compromise essential truths or traditional practice. Making an idol out of tolerance.
3. Response: Catholics need to embrace the Protestant Principle which enables a critique of authoritarian practice and the exercise of papal power; Protestants need to accept the Catholic substance including the sacramental principle and the celebration of sacraments. Both principles must be at work in one institution.
4. Tillich gave a talk in May of 1963 sponsored by the Newman Club at the University of Missouri in Kansas City with a response by George Tavard. Tillich saw signs of hope: popularity of Pope John XXIII; Protestant observers at Vatican II; ecumenical discussions around the world, etc. Protestantism has concentrated on the Bible and bypassed the long tradition and lost sense of mysticism and ability to see "the Reality of the divine" in the real world. Furthermore, the authoritative structure of the Catholic Church is an obstacle to reunion and the real basis of reunion is the shared foundation in "the New Reality as it had appeared in the Christ: the essential unity of the whole human family "drives toward an empirical unity;" Church must maintain a prophetic voice, the Divine Spirit. It is possible to see more recent progress between Lutherans and Catholics as an example of Protestants accepting Catholic substance and Catholics being more open to the Protestant Principle and its prophetic function. In discussing Mary, he saw "an empty space" in Protestantism and the need for "female symbolization" in reflecting on the divine.

F. Prophetic

1. Question: How can we create a more just and peaceful world: What can Christians contribute to that effort?
2. Danger: failing to see demonic elements in the culture, making an idol out of nationalism and consumerism.

3. Response: cf *Love Power and Justice* by Tillich) Love drives toward union which overcomes estrangement. The Church does not have a concrete social, political or economic structure to promote justice. The Church should participate in culture which can affect society. It promotes justice by revealing demonic tendencies and listening to prophetic voices outside the Church. The Church must recognize injustice in its own structures.
4. Tillich fired from position as full professor at University of Frankfurt for his book *The Socialist Decision* which attacks Nazi ideology and anti-Semitism. Nazis offered him a position at the University of Berlin if he would disclaim the book, but he refused and came to the USA.

G. Sacramental

1. Question: How can I get more out of liturgy?
2. Danger: formalism in worship; taking religious symbols literally; making an idol out of sacraments
3. Response: Symbols, like signs, point beyond themselves but, unlike signs, they participate in the reality and power of the reality symbolized. Liturgical language functions symbolically. Symbols open up deeper levels of reality (liturgical art and music) and also deeper levels of the soul. God is a symbolic word. Religious symbols point to the dimension of the Holy and Ultimate Reality. All finite realities can symbolize the Holy. There is always the danger of making ritual acts and objects into idols. God transcends our experience of ourselves and yet can be addressed as Thou in prayer. To say God is almighty, merciful, powerful, father and person cannot be taken literally nor can statements like "He sent his son" be taken literally but taken symbolically point to the ultimate Christian experience of the relationship between God and man. Sacraments are symbolic actions. Their symbolic elements carry more than literal meaning not less. We should not say "merely symbolic." Tillich stresses the importance of the cross of the Christ the criterion for all other symbols (cf *Theology of Culture* p. 53).
4. Tillich's engagement with the world of art which "penetrate into the depth of things which are beyond the reality of cognition." Much traditional Western church art does not reveal depth but Eastern iconography does as does Picasso's *Guernica* showing the ravages of wartime bombings.

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Karl Rahner: Bridges to China

Monday, June 17th, 5:30 – 7:00

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