

The Rev. Dr. Paul Tillich On The Bearers Of History: Communities, Personalities And Mankind ¹

Footnotes and Concluding Exposition
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The Rev. Dr. Paul Tillich
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Man actualizes himself as a person in the encounter with other persons within a community. The process of self-integration under the dimension of spirit actualizes both the personality and the community. Although we have described the actualization of the personality in connection with moral principles, we have postponed the discussion of the actualization of the community to this point because life processes in a community are immediately determined by the historical dimension in accordance with the fact that the direct bearers of history are groups rather than individuals, who are only indirect bearers.

History-bearing groups are characterized by their ability to act in a centered way. They must have a centered power which is able to keep the individuals who belong to it united and which is able to preserve its power in the encounter with similar power groups. In order to fulfill the first condition a

¹ This sub-topic of Tillich's system is a powerful, plenary and integrated essay on the constituting entities of history. It is apropos current conditions and questions (1) in the area David Brooks of the New York Times and others call "cultural geography" and (2) because it accurately analyses the realities that drive the core question citizens of the United States are asking themselves and their representatives in the Fall of 2006: is our nation inexorably destined to be riven by civil war and/or destroyed by external aggression?

history-bearing group must have a central, law-giving, administering, and enforcing authority. In order to fulfill the second condition a history-bearing group must have tools to keep itself in power in the encounter with other powers. Both conditions are fulfilled in what is called, in modern terminology, a "state," and in this sense history is the history of states. But this statement needs several qualifications. First, one must point to the fact that the term "state" is much younger than the state-like organizations of large families, clans, tribes, cities, and nations, in which the two conditions of being bearers of history were previously fulfilled. Second, one must emphasize that historical influence can be exercised in many ways by economical, cultural, or religious groups and movements that work within a state or that cut across many states. Still, their historical effect is conditioned by the existence of the organized internal and external power of history-bearing groups. The fact that in many countries even the periods of artistic style are named for emperors or sequences of emperors indicates the basic character of political organizations for all historical existence.

The history-bearing group was described as a central group with internal and external power. This, however, does not mean that the political power in both directions is a mechanism independent of the life of the group. In every power

structure *eros*² relations underlie the organizational form. Power through administering and enforcing the law, or power through imposing law by conquest, presupposes a central power group whose authority is acknowledged at least silently; otherwise it would not have the support necessary for enforcement and conquest. A withdrawal of such silent acknowledgement by the supporters of a power structure undercuts it. The support is based on an experience of belonging, a form of communal *eros* which does not exclude struggles for power within the supporting group but which unites it against other groups. This is obvious in all statelike organizations from the family up to the nation. Blood relations, language, traditions, and memories create many forms of *eros* which make the power structure possible. Preservation by enforcement and increase by conquest follow, but do not produce, the historical power of a group. The element of compulsion in every historical power structure is not its foundation but an unavoidable condition of its existence. It is at the same time the cause of its destruction if the *eros* relations disappear or are completely replaced by force.

One way among others in which the *eros* relations that underlie a power structure express themselves is in the legal principles that determine the laws and their administration by the ruling center. The legal system of a history-

² *Eros* here does not mean erotic in the sense of sexual. Tillich uses this Greek word in the sense of classical Greek philosophy, where it indicates desire for that which is superior to oneself. In classical philosophy there are three kinds of desire, which we translate as "love." *Libido* is desire for an inferior. *Philia* is desire for an equal. *Eros* is desire for a superior. To these three existential categories, or immediate experiences, Christianity has added a fourth, from St. Paul: *agape*, which is desire-less desire or self-less-ness. Selfless service and selfless love -- which look not for "a return on investment" or for "the fruits of one's labors" -- are expressions of *agape*. The yearning for learning, for accomplishment, for belonging, for fulfillment, for enrichment, for recognition -- these are expressions of *eros* which in modern parlance could be termed "erotic love." In this classical sense, and not a modern sexual one, Tillich uses *eros* throughout his work. In this instance, he uses it in the sense of the desire to belong to a group and, by implication, to support that group because the desiring person belongs to it and actualizes their personality in their encounter with that group. Patriotism is an *eros* relation, an "erotic love" in the classical sense of the word, which can become the *agape* love of selfless sacrifice in potentiality and actuality.

bearing group is derived neither from an abstract concept of justice nor from the will to power of the ruling center. Both factors contribute to the concrete structure of justice. They can also destroy it if one of them prevails, for neither of them is the basis of a statelike structure. The basis of every legal system is the *eros* relations of the group in which they appear.

It is, however, not only the power of the group in terms of enforceable internal and external security but also the aim toward which it strives which makes it a history-bearing group. History runs in a horizontal direction, and the groups which give it this direction are determined by an aim toward which they strive and a destiny they try to fulfill. One could call this the "vocational consciousness" of a history-bearing group. It differs from group to group not only in character but also in the degree of consciousness and of motivating power. But vocational feeling has been present since the earliest times of historical mankind. Its most conspicuous expression is perhaps the call to Abraham in which the vocational consciousness of Israel finds its symbolic expression; and we find analogous forms in China, in Egypt, and in Babylon. The vocational consciousness of Greece was expressed in the distinction between Greeks and barbarians, that of Rome was based on the superiority of the Roman law, that of medieval Germany on the symbol of the Holy Roman Empire of German nationality, that of Italy on the "rebirth" of civilization in the Renaissance, that of Spain on the idea of the Catholic unity of the world, that of France on its leadership in intellectual culture, that of England on the task of subjecting all peoples to a Christian humanism, that of Russia on the salvation of the West through the traditions of the Greek church or through the Marxist prophecy, that of the United States on the belief in a new beginning in which the curses of the Old World are overcome and the democratic missionary task fulfilled. Where the vocational consciousness has vanished or never fully developed, as in nineteenth-century Germany and Italy and smaller states with artificial boundaries, the element of power becomes predominant either in an aggressive or in a merely defensive sense. But even in these cases, as the recent examples of Germany and Italy show, the need for a vocational self-understanding is so strong that the absurdities of Nazi-racism were accepted because they filled a vacuum.

The fact of a vocational consciousness shows that the content of history is the life of the history-bearing group in all dimensions. No dimension of life is excluded from the living memory of the group, but there are differences of choice. The political realm is always predominant because it is constitutive of historical existence. Within this frame, social, economic, cultural, and religious developments have an equal right to consideration. In some periods, more - and in some periods, less - emphasis can be given any one of them. Certainly the history of man's cultural functions is not confined to any concrete history-bearing group, not even the largest. But if the cultural or religious historian crosses the political boundaries he is aware that this is an abstraction from actual life, and he does not forget that the *political* unities, whether large or small, remain the conditions of all cultural life. The primacy of political history cannot be disregarded, either for the sake of an independent intellectual history demanded by idealistic historians or for the sake of a determining economic history demanded by materialistic historians. History itself has refuted the demands of the latter whenever they seemed to be near fulfillment, as in Zionist Israel or Communist Russia. It is significant that the symbol in which the Bible expresses the meaning of history is political: "Kingdom of God," and not "Life of the Spirit" or "economic abundance." The element of centeredness which characterizes the political realm makes it an adequate symbol for the ultimate aim of history.

This leads to the question of whether one could call mankind, rather than particular human groups, the bearer of history. For the limited character of groups necessarily seems to disrupt the unity which is intended in the symbol "Kingdom of God." But the form of this question prejudices the answer; the aim of history does not lie in history. There is no united mankind within history. It certainly did not exist in the past; nor can it exist in the future because a politically united mankind, though imaginable, would be a diagonal between convergent and divergent vectors. Its political unity would be the framework for a disunity that is the consequence of human freedom with its dynamic that surpasses everything given. The situation would be different only if the unity of mankind were the end of history and the frame for the post-historical stage in which man's aroused freedom would have come to rest. This would be the state of "animal blessedness." As long as there is history, a "united mankind" is the frame for a "disunited mankind." Only in posthistory could the disunity

disappear, but such a state would not be the Kingdom of God, for the Kingdom of God is not "animal blessedness."

Historical groups are communities of individuals. They are not entities alongside or above the individuals of whom they are constituted; they are products of the social function of these individuals. The social function produces a structure which gains a partial independence from the individuals (as is the case in all other functions), but this independence does not produce a new reality, with a center of willing and acting. It is not "the community" that wills and acts; it is individuals in their social quality and through their representatives who make communal actions possible by making centeredness possible. The "deception of personifying the group" should be revealed and denounced, especially to point out tyrannical abuses of this deception. So we must ask again: In what sense is the individual a bearer of history? In spite of the criticism of any attempt to personalize the group, the answer must be that the individual is the bearer of history only in relation to a history-bearing group. His individual life process is not history, and therefore biography is not history. But it can become significant either as the story of somebody who actively and symbolically represents a history-bearing group (Caesar, Lincoln) or as an individual who represents the average situation within a group (*the peasant, the bourgeois*). The relation to the group of historically significant individuals is especially obvious in persons who have left the community to go into seclusion in the "desert" or into "exile." In so far as they are historically significant, they remain related to the group from which they come and to which they might return, or they establish a relation with the new group which they enter and in which they may become historically significant. But as mere individuals they have no historical significance. History is the history of groups.

This, however, does not answer the question: Who determines the historical processes, "great" individuals or mass movements? The question in this form is unanswerable because no empirical evidence can be found to support the one or the other point of view. The question is also misleading. The adjective "great," in history, is attributed to persons who are great as leaders in the movements of history-bearing groups. The term "great" in this sense implies the relation to masses. Individuals who have had potential historical greatness but have never reached actualization are not called great, because the

potentiality to greatness can be tested only by its actualization. Concretely speaking, one would have to say that no one can achieve historical greatness who is not received by history-bearing groups. On the other hand, the movements of the masses would never occur without the productive power of individuals in whom the potentialities and actual trends of the many become conscious and formulated. The question of whether individuals or "masses" determine history must be replaced by an exact description of their interplay.

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Concluding Exposition

Question: Is there or can there be a community of nations having a centered will and actions?

Answer: No and no.

History is the activities of nations or nation-states because these only have centeredness, although it is conditional. There is no centeredness, even conditional, in a "community of nations" so there is not government by that hypothetical abstraction either.

Question: Is there or can there be a united mankind?

Answer: No and no.

Because "a 'united mankind' is the frame for a 'disunited mankind.'" is manifest everywhere today and always, and unchangeably so. "The 'deception of personifying the group' should be exposed and denounced, especially to point out tyrannical abuses of this deception." And so I denounce those who promote this impossibility in their doctrines of "multiculturalism" and "world community" as a standard to which nations must conform. These doctrines commend tyranny. The aim of these doctrines is to disestablish nations and return social organization to tribal forms, which they regard as unnecessary and undesirable in any case because humanism is educating all men to live merely in process, above, beyond and without social organization! -- as if tribes would not and do not already act in the pretense of nationhood!

Question: Is there or can there be a “world government,” as some assert the UN is and should be?

Answer: No and no.

Is this not obvious? Wishing “world government” into existence or declaring it to exist cannot make it exist. Nothing can.

Question: Do, should or can individuals and their “rights” predominate in history?

Answer: No, no and no.

Individuals can actualize their personalities only in encounter with groups to which they belong, including their nation. Each person has Seven Mothers according to Vedic doctrine and one of these is Mother Nation. The Seven are : Natural Mother, Mother Earth, Mother Cow, Mother Language, Mother Religion, Mother Scripture, Mother Nation. There is no actualization of a personality apart from these Mothers each of us has by destiny, as condition of existence.

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