

D0108

Theo 143 . Religion and Culture , Lecture One : Culture ①

1. Theology's ^{function} is defined by B. Lonergan as mediating between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix. A theology, then, states the pertinence of religion for a given cultural situation. This is its principal task. Thus in a course entitled religion and culture, we are at the very nerve of theology. We are explicitly performing theology's central task: at least if one accepts Lonergan's definition of that task.
2. Now, in order to perform this task, we have to get several things straight. First, we have to delineate as carefully as possible our contemporary cultural situation. What is culture in general? What is the cultural situation in which we find ourselves? What is coming into being in our time in terms of culture? What is fading away? Or is nothing coming into being and nothing fading away? Are we in a stable or dynamically changing cultural situation? If it is changing, are there sufficient indications of the nature of the change to permit us to describe with some accuracy what is going forward? Or is the change so chaotic and directionless at present that it leaves us without a clue as to what is going on?
3. Secondly, we have to deal with religion. What is religion? Are there different kinds of religion? Are some of them authentic and some inauthentic? If so, what criteria establish authenticity? What in my own life can I point to and name religion? Finally, what, if anything, does this have to do with what is going forward in our cultural situation?
4. A culture is ~~the~~ ^{at least implicitly} the operative set of ^{assumptions concerning} meanings and values that inform the lifestyle of a given group of people. Strictly speaking, for every such set of meanings and values, there is a different culture. Thus, in the United

states today, for example, we can speak of many cultures, if we take this definition in its strict form. We may speak, for example, of white middle-class suburban culture, of the culture of the super-rich, of black militant culture, of other forms of black culture, of feminist culture, playboy culture, homosexual culture, the culture of the University, youth culture, the culture of various religious movements such as the Jesus movement or the Hare Krishna movement, etc. To the extent one is sharing in the operative assumptions of meaning and value that really inform and determine a given style of life, one is a participant in a culture.

5. According to this definition of culture, one may participate in several cultures at once. Thus one may, for example, share in operative assumptions of white middle-class suburban culture and feminist culture; or of a form of contemporary black culture along with the culture of a religious movement or of a University. To the extent one participates in two or more cultures whose operative assumptions of meaning and value clash, one experiences conflict, the kind of conflict that has to be resolved individually first but that may then lead to modifications in cultural assumptions on the part of a group or perhaps even to the formation of a new culture.
6. Along with this restricted or stricter notion of culture, however, we may deal also with a more general notion that embraces larger totalities of people or longer periods of time. Thus there is legitimacy in speaking of American culture informed by a certain set of operative assumptions that are shared by members of different smaller and more restricted cultural units. Or we may speak of Graeco-Roman culture, of medieval and Renaissance culture, of modern and post-modern culture. In each of these instances, our use of the word "culture" is perhaps less precise than in our first instance, but still valid. Lewis Mumford, in The

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Transformations of Man, speaks quite intelligently of Archaic man, civilized man, axial man, old world man, new world man, post-historic man, and world cultural man. In each instance he is speaking of at least implicit assumptions of meaning and value shared in common by groups of people, and thus he is speaking of cultures.

7. In general, we will be using the word "culture" in this broader sense. But it is important to note that the two usages are not unrelated to one another. Thus the various restricted instances of culture listed above may all be more or less instances of civilized man. Beyond that, some of them -- e.g., the better variants of feminist culture -- may be incipient instances of what Mumford calls world culture. Thus the broader or more general usage of the word, culture, is, at least from a historical perspective, the more basic, the more important usage. It states a general framework of intelligibility for ~~what~~ understanding what is going forward in the interrelations and conflicts of smaller cultural units. And it serves particularly well to help us understand those major changes in human history that mark off one age or epoch from another.

8. It is this last function, ^{of the general usage of the word, culture,} that will serve us particularly well in this course. For we will be highlighting in many ways the beginnings of such a major change in our own lifetime. From many sides and many experts, we hear it said that the entire human race is entering a new cultural epoch. Douergan speaks of it as the age of the control of meaning through interiority. Mumford will speak of two options before us: post-historic man or world cultural man. Carl Jung speaks of the age of individuation or the pursuit of ~~personal~~ wholeness of the ~~to~~ personality, and takes quite seriously the correlations of this pursuit with the beginnings of the astrological age of Aquarius. And scholars of religion speak of the coming convergence of the major

religions of the world, so that, for example, one may be simultaneously a Christian and a Hindu, or a Christian and a Taoist, as many followers of Jung may be as a result of being introduced to the I Ching. There is something held in common by all of these interpretations of the emerging epoch: each in its own way speaks of a new expansion and heightening and differentiation of human consciousness. Consciousness is being stretched to new possibilities, and with this stretching there are emerging new operative assumptions of meaning and value, new life-styles, new patterns of relationship between men and women and among men and among women. And consciousness is, of course, radically a matter of the individual. Although we may speak of a collective consciousness shared by a group, from a more radical and primordial point of view it is individuals who are conscious. Consciousness is the unity of my presence to myself in my various human operations: the unity of the consciousness of the dream flowing into the ~~same~~ consciousness of waking experience, of understanding, of judging, of deciding. And so the primary ~~domain~~ ^{arena} of the ~~end~~ drama of an emerging cultural epoch is the consciousness of the individual. Here is where the emerging epoch is taking form, where the struggle is being fought, and the breakthroughs either made or refused. The principal cultural phenomenon of our age, in terms of the future of humanity, is the prevalent struggle for greater consciousness and corresponding life-styles on the part of the contemporary individual intent on psychological and social liberation from the now constricting pressures of a dying cultural epoch.

as Gandhi was,

of loving.