

The Contemporary Religious Encounter

Faith and Understanding in America by Gustave Weigel. Macmillan. 170 pp. \$3.75.

by Robert McAfee Brown

Father Weigel is one of the most important spokesmen in the current discussion of religion and the pluralistic society. He has written and lectured widely on this subject, and his book is a collection of speeches and articles created to further the discussion. While a number of them have been published elsewhere, they have not before been available to the general reader.

If there is an overall concern which unifies the book it is the fact that our contemporary culture forces us to take a fresh look not only at the broad problem of "faith and culture," but also at the relationship of various faiths *within* a culture. These two concerns cannot really be separated, and Father Weigel has many perceptive things to say about both of them. While two of the essays are very broad and synoptic in their sweep, all of the rest of the essays deal with Catholicism, and particularly with the problem of the relationship of Catholicism and Protestantism in America.

The latter problem is surely emerging as one of the dominant themes of American domestic life, and it needs all of the wisdom, charity and clarity which can be brought to bear upon it. Fortunately, Father Weigel has been well endowed with these attributes, and both Catholic and non-Catholic have much to learn from him. This overall satisfaction, however, must be put in a context of minor dissatisfaction at three points.

First of all, the book does not represent the best of Father Weigel's writing. This is not to say

Dr. Brown, who teaches at Union Theological Seminary, is a member of the editorial board of *Christianity and Crisis*.

that it is an unimportant book or not worth reading. It is to say that Father Weigel has many articles in print more substantial than those included here, and that he must be urged to make them available to a wider reading public.

Secondly, I have a Protestant concern about the essay on "Protestantism as a Catholic Concern." In this essay, Father Weigel describes the contemporary Protestant mind by an extended discussion of three books, one of these being a collection of sermons by a "liberal" pastor of whom I had never heard, and another being *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale, of whom I have heard all too much. I am in full concurrence with Father Weigel's indictment of this kind of Protestantism, but it seems to me a large jump to generalize from it to the conclusion that "little by little the whole substance of Christianity is being leached (*sic*) out of the churches and nihilism is taking its place."

I think a Catholic reader would be similarly dissatisfied with an article on "Catholicism as a Protestant Concern" which confined its discussion of contemporary Catholicism exclusively to, say, Cardinal Ottaviani, Monsignor Fenton and Bishop Sheen, and then drew appropriate Protestant conclusions about the whole of Catholicism therefrom.

My third concern has to do with the question, "To whom is the book really addressed?" Some of the essays are clearly attempts to interpret Catholicism to non-Catholics. Others have a very broad orientation. Still others are attempts to give Catholic readers a little insight into the Protestant mentality (and one of them is much more successful than the one cited above). One is a straightforward descriptive statement of American Catholicism. The reader therefore has to

change mental and spiritual gears from essay to essay, and he may not always be an expert enough theological driver to get his clutch clear down to the floor each time.

The assets of the book, however, far outweigh these minor liabilities. To the non-Catholic reader, the greatest asset of the book is its ability to help him understand both how and why a Catholic thinks as he does. This is particularly true of the opening essay on "The Catholic Conception of Religious Truth." The non-Catholic reader will also learn from a Catholic (and it is important that he learn it from a Catholic) why Catholics cannot participate in the World Council of Churches. He will learn of the deep concern which the Catholic has to "communicate" with a world which shares basically different presuppositions. And he will learn that the Catholic realizes his obligation to be "more than a witness to the Gospel. He is also a neighbor to those who do not accept his witness."

Finally, Father Weigel helps the non-Catholic to understand a very important fact about the Catholic-Protestant dialogue. For he insists on the unchangeableness of the teaching of the Church in the face of a curious phenomenon which often leads non-Catholics to think that the Church is "modernizing" its doctrine. The phenomenon is this: a non-Catholic has a very distorted understanding of some aspect of Catholic faith—say the "outside the Church there is no salvation" part. He engages in study and discovers that actually it means something different from what he originally thought it meant. Therefore, he jumps to the conclusion that it is the Catholic belief, rather than his own understanding of that belief, which has changed.

And he goes on from there to the further conclusion that in the process of time, and possibly with

a little help and enlightenment from non-Catholics, Catholic dogma will gradually become reformed so that differences between Catholics and Protestants will disappear. But Father Weigel is, very wisely, uncompromising and forthright on this point: Catholic dogma does *not* change, and Catholics will find no final com-

mon meeting ground with non-Catholics save Catholic dogma. (*Mutatis mutandis*, let it be added, the true Protestant will say the same from his perspective.)

These are the only realistic terms in which to foster the dialogue between the two groups. Two groups there are, and two groups there will be, as far as is

humanly foreseeable. They must, therefore, engage more fully than ever in the kind of dialogue which Father Weigel's book represents, speaking both to themselves and to one another, so that if there cannot now be religious unity, there can at least (and it is no small thing) be solidarity as brethren.

A HUMANIST IN MOSCOW

The Communist World and Ours by Walter Lippmann. Little, Brown. 56 pp. \$2.00.

Almost fifty years ago, Walter Lippmann studied at Harvard under George Santayana. In the subsequent decades Lippmann has played many roles: diplomat, editor, moralist, journalist, pundit par excellence. In all of them one can see traces of the Santayana spirit. While the century has grown progressively anarchic, Lippmann has been a public monument to the Life of Reason. To a generation caught up in fanaticisms and crusades he has proclaimed a sense of contingency, irony, tradition, and that ordered scepticism about history which (in Santayana's view) is the mark of a civilized man.

The Communist World and Ours, Mr. Lippmann's report on his conversations last autumn with Premier Khrushchev, exemplifies this balanced reasonableness, which has been the author's major contribution to our public life. Here, as elsewhere, he attempts to bring a measure of objectivity and detachment to a problem that is usually clouded over with emotion and bombast. Mr. Lippmann is an enemy of illusions, and both East and West, he believes, are beset with them. He would have both reexamine the world coolly,

and be willing to settle for much less than either desires—because much less is all either can have if there is to be any future at all.

The views of both camps, Mr. Lippmann believes, are "derived from the same very human and common fallacy. It is the fallacy of assuming that this is one world and that the social order to which one belongs must either perish or become the universal order of mankind. But," he says, "looking at the history of the globe, the truth, as I see it, is that there has never been one world . . . The failure to recognize this truth that there are many worlds, not merely one, is, I believe, the deepest source of confusion between us, and the most stubborn obstacle to that mutual toleration which is the very best that is conceivable between our two societies."

What Americans must do, Mr. Lippmann insists, is be rid of one-world illusions and "relax their fears in order to fortify and clarify their purposes." What their purposes must be, he thinks, are the nurturing and fortification of freedom in those areas of the world—Asia and Africa—where the real issue between democracy and totalitarianism will be resolved. Unless a heroic effort is made here, the future will indeed belong to Marxism.

"The Communists are expanding in Asia," he writes, "because

they are demonstrating a way, at present the only obvious and effective way, of raising quickly the power and the standard of living of a backward people. The only convincing answer to that must be a demonstration by the non-Communist nations that there is another and more humane way of overcoming the immemorial poverty and weakness of the Asian peoples.

"This demonstration can best be made in India," Mr. Lippmann says, "and there is little doubt in my mind that if we and our Western partners could underwrite and assure the success of India's development, it would make a world of difference. It might be decisive in turning the tide. It would put an end to the enervating feeling of fatality and inevitability, to the sense that Communism is the only wave of the future . . . and that the West is impotent and too lazy to do anything but let the future go by default."

The Communist World and Ours is a short book, and wise with the wisdom for which Walter Lippmann is famous. Such wisdom, of course, may not be enough. The humanism of a George Santayana, even, may be inadequate to master the demonic forces of modern totalitarianism, and the future may resist all attempts at rational ordering. Be that as it may, the duty to make the attempts lies upon us, and Mr. Lippmann sets an example of how to begin them. W. C.