

# Religion's Quest for the Modern World

**Theology of Culture** by Paul Tillich. Oxford University Press. 213 pp. \$4.00.

**Religion and Culture: Essays in Honor of Paul Tillich.** Harper. 399 pp. \$7.50.

by Paul Ramsey

Rhetorically, we speak of ourselves as a "religious people," but no single religion has anywhere near a monopoly among us; rather, a mature secularism combines with our seemingly unalterable religious pluralism to achieve a friendly tolerance of all ultimates, so long as none is imported too directly into the public domain. We live in what has been called a post-religious world, and the various religions are struggling to come to terms with this fact.

There is thus great need for serious, continuing examination of the nature of this world and the role of religion in it, and in recent years Paul Tillich has been hailed as the theologian *par excellence* of the modern situation. He addresses himself to its special ambiguities and anguish—in its own language. No consideration of the relationship of religion to contemporary culture and politics can ignore Tillich's influence, and two recent books give eloquent evidence of his special significance.

In *Theology of Culture*, Tillich himself examines various aspects of the modern religious-cultural dilemma. Except for one chapter on the struggle between "time" and "space" in the religions and cultures of mankind, all of the essays in this volume have been published before. But none is earlier than 1940 and more than half were written within the past

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five years. Together, they represent Tillich's most mature reflections upon a number of themes that are central in our time.

In *Religion and Culture*, the volume of essays in Tillich's honor, twenty-five eminent scholars give witness to Tillich's distinguished position among modern thinkers. The contributors include, among others, Karl Barth, Karl Loewith, Wilhelm Pauck, Stanley Hopper, Georges Florovsky, Rudolf Sohm, John C. Bennett and Gustave Weigel, and the essays range over the wide field of modern religious thought. For one or more of them, this volume will long be consulted.

The depth of discussion in these two books is certainly what our civilization needs if it is to come to understand itself. In our pluralistic society, not only do specific religions differ over their social teachings; they also differ over what areas of socio-political life come under the authority of religious influence at all. Hence the rubric "pluralism" is only a way of lessening, not of avoiding, the collision of irreconcilable religious positions in politics and social life. It is hardly possible, for example, for a Roman Catholic to feel as does the Protestant the demoralization of *res publica* from the legalization of gambling, or for the Protestant to have the Catholic's sense of the demoralization introduced into the public order by the legalization of divorce.

Nevertheless, the pluralistic society, in conception and in actuality, must be counted a great achievement of modern times. From the standpoint of religious *liberty*, the contribution of religious pluralism should never be forgotten. If human freedom in the civil order is in any sense the will of God, then it would seem that religious pluralism is

also in some sense the will of God.

But if the question is not of religious *liberty* but of religion itself, the contrary may be the case. Historically, it seems clear that religious pluralism is related to the fact that this is indeed a post-religious age. A definite faith in God as God alone, and the love and praise of Him, are not natural spiritual activities for men who know too well alternative ways of doing these things—and even the "Or" that they do them not at all.

No amount of theorizing that, after all, religious *faith* implies religious *liberty*, and that faith includes the moment of doubt, can obscure the fact that in a pluralistic-secular society, where no religion is destined to prevail, religious faith that is full in its objective meaning and still subjectively authentic becomes ever more difficult. In such a society men can at most "trim the lamps" of their ultimate concern.

Kierkegaard once wrote that "if a man is to be a Christian, it is doubtless requisite for him to believe something *definite*; but it is just as certainly requisite for him to be *quite definite* that 'he' believes." Stanley Hopper takes this as the theme of his chapter in the Tillich *Festschrift*. As Martin Buber states the essence of Judaism, the man who does not believe that God delivered *him* out of Egypt ceases to be a Jew. But in the modern world, after so many pilgrimages have been taken, and where diverse religious understandings closely co-exist, while the something which "Judaism" believes remains definite, it is not quite definite that "I" believe this, and that "I" am thereby constituted a Jew.

So too, the man who does not believe that in Jesus Christ God delivered *him* out of the Egypt

of sin and death, ceases to be a Christian. This, and many another formulation of the same theme, remain the something definite which "Christianity" believes; but in the modern world it is increasingly indefinite that "I" believe.

Surrounded by plural religions and secularistic persuasions, a man can scarcely say *credo* without stammering, unless he has the support gained from living within some particular community of faith. Because for faith to be definitely *in the man*, the man must be in the community of faithful men and women. But the religious area in which the man of faith moves today is no longer the wide world of an entire culture. It is rather the *corpus Christi* without the *corpus Christianum*. In modern life, therefore, the reconciliation between the something definite that "religion" believes and the definite "he" who believes it often takes place in a way no orthodox theologian could approve.

It is this fact that makes Paul Tillich the theologian *par excellence* of our religiously pluralistic, largely secular culture. Tillich insists that religion is the root of culture, and culture the flowering of religion. Religion, he says, is "the meaning-giving substance of culture"; and, as religion is the "substance" of culture, so "culture is the form of religion."

Such indeed was the case in every period except the present, and in every other culture known to man. But when Tillich attempts to show the relatedness of *contemporary* cultural expressions to their religious ground, his analysis seems as empty of substance as the present age is of religion. Picasso's "Guernica," he says, is "a great Protestant painting." The brokenness of modern art forms in general are "symbolic of an attitude which is aware of one's not-having." The "unconditioned seriousness is the expression of the divine

in the experience of utter separation from it." The something definite of atheism is really not very different from the something definite of theism as a measure and token of faith.

Tillich's use of the "Protestant principle"—not this, not that is my God—as a critique of idolatry, but separated from the quite definite things the Reformers quite definitely believed, gives the Protestant principle a mainly negative significance it never had for the Reformers. He talks much of "the God beyond God," and "the courage to be" nevertheless, and of existentialism as a movement of protest and a sounding of the depths. But is it not obvious that this movement and this sounding lack both the form and the substance of religion? They do not have the capacity to create a culture and are essentially estranged from the religious ground.

Tillich's model of the relation of religion and culture as the relation of meaning-giving substance to its forms gives a true report of any previous civilization which possessed religion and culture. But his own theology of culture, following as faithfully as it does the character of modern existence, itself shows plainly that this is no longer the case. His theology of culture, and the way he speaks directly to the condition of modern man, raise the basic problem of contemporary civilization, which is, whether this is not, after all, a predominantly non-cultural, non-religious civilization. Indeed, the current vogue of "theology of culture," which hesitates to speak directly of God or to Him (theology) or to apply His Word to the illumination of human institutions and behavior (theological ethics), gives evidence of the same malaise.

Years ago Tillich wrote that "a frost has fallen upon all the things of which we have spoken, whether it be the youth movement or the philosophy of life;

whether it be expressionism or religious socialism." As Walter Leibrich point out in introducing *Religion and Culture*, the volume of essays edited by him, these were reconciliations in thought and not, as proclaimed, reconciliations in existence. Is not all this also true of the theology of culture? More and more, a mature secularism which has grown up in the midst of, and partly because of, religious pluralism refuses to be pushed back upon any divine ground.

In a very real sense, therefore, it seems clear to me that Paul Tillich, while he is an eminent theologian and a richly cultured man, is precisely not the theologian of *this* culture. World-wide industrialism, with its depersonalization of all forms of human life, not only empties human culture of substance, but empties it also of the sense of emptiness, or of nostalgia for the lost substance. Not only the something definite it is requisite to believe is eroded in the modern world, but as a consequence with each passing generation it becomes more uncertain whether it is quite definitely "I" who encounter more than the immediate realities before me.

As Charles West has pointed out, "Marxism has taken its place within the framework of this world of autonomous human problem-solving, and has launched its revolution from there." This only stimulates more of the same autonomous human problem-solving on our side, accompanied by the only faith the vast majority of men in the present day can be quite sure they go along in affirming, namely the faith in an absent God.

Where are the cultural forms of today of which religion could possibly be the substance? Those that remain are aging, and are not the characteristic structures or products of this civilization. But modern civilization advances, and the oil burns low in the lamps of ultimate concern.

**Man, the State and War**

by Kenneth N. Waltz. Columbia. 263 pp. \$5.50.

Professor Waltz applies the classical political theories of such philosophers as St. Augustine, Spinoza, Kant, Hobbes and Marx, as well as the views of behavioral scientists and the commentaries of such contemporary thinkers as Niebuhr and Morgenthau to a consideration of the causes of war.

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