

PAUL TILLICH AND THE POSSIBILITY OF REVELATION THROUGH FILM by Jonathan Brant, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. x + 270, £65, hbk*

Jonathan Brant is an Anglican Pastorate Chaplain for postgraduate students at Oxford University. In his DPhil in Theology at Trinity College, Oxford, UK, now published as a book by Oxford University Press, he explores the potential religious impact of contemporary non-religious themed cinema on secularized audiences. He draws upon the systematic theology of revelation through culture of Paul Tillich, as well as film theory and qualitative research.

The book is divided into four parts. Part One presents the purpose and genesis of the project and a critical survey of writing on religion and film in the twentieth century. Part Two delves deeply into Paul Tillich's intricate systematic theology on the possibility of revelation through ('high') culture. He ends by providing a theoretical justification for the application of Tillich's theology to the medium of film. Part Three continues with a qualitative research project which attempts to ground Tillich's theoretical account in the experiences of a group of filmgoers of the Cinemateca film club in Montevideo, Uruguay. Part Four reexamines Tillich's theory in light of the empirical data.

Part One places the reader up-to-date on the religion/film dialogue of the twentieth century. He offers a best practice in the discourse in light of the most common criticisms. This is one of the book's best contributions to the expanding literature that unites theology or religious studies with film studies and film theory. Brant offers a clear and insightful presentation in Part Two of Paul Tillich's complex theory of the possibility of revelation through culture. He wrestles with the strengths and weaknesses of Tillich's theology of revelation. Tillich's theology tends to focus on 'high' culture as well as the saving and healing power of revelation rather than its communicative content. Nevertheless, Brant argues the appropriateness of Tillich's theology for the subject matter because of its phenomenological attentiveness to real life experience of the power of art. Nonetheless, Brant suggests that it might be helpful to identify a stronger link than Tillich allows between the subject matter of the artwork, the content of revelation and the effect of revelation.

Brant probes extensively into the literature on methodology in selecting an appropriate research paradigm and methodology, and instruments that will help him substantiate Tillich's theory. Eventually, Brant grounds Tillich's theory by qualitative research. This results in an increased appreciation of the sensitivity of Tillich's theology to the uniqueness of each film-to-viewer encounter. However, after analyzing the empirical data, Brant proposes in Part Four a new hypothesis of the revelatory potential of film that is related to community and to sustained life-practice rather than individual and momentary experience as proposed by Tillich.

After three very strong parts, it is my opinion that the latter section of Part Three, the actual application of empirical research to Tillich's theory, is the weakest section. First of all, a history of Uruguay focusing on its religious context, the relationship between Church and State, and the secularizing forces unique to that country, would have been most helpful in understanding the background of his research sample. Moreover, the subjects of Brant's research were at the time members of a film club (Cinemateca in Montevideo). Through communal and sustained life-practice they already sought to be enlightened by South American independent films, a cinema which tends to be a 'message'-driven cinema; hence the relatively high ratio of 'spiritual or cognitive experiences' reported. I was also not convinced that most of the experiences analyzed were spiritual, rather than 'aha' moments when the dots finally connect. As Barsotti and Johnston state in their book *Finding God in the Movies*: 'When we truly experience forgiveness,

reconciliation, alienation, or friendship at the movies, that is a spiritual experience... We have been drawn into the story because of its humanity; we leave the movie transformed because we have met divinity' (p. 18). I believe this is closer to what Tillich meant by a revelatory experience. Also, as Brant himself admits, it would have been more interesting, and a better test of Tillich's theory, to carry out a second study in the local multiplex. This would have proven whether the cinema somewhat dismissively labeled 'commercial' might itself be a medium of revelation for a wider expectation-free audience.

Brant's book is an excellent and invaluable resource for scholars who are interested in the interaction between theology or religious studies with film studies and film theory, as well as Paul Tillich's systematic theology on the possibility of revelation through culture, not to mention research methodologies. However, due to its complexity and academic style, this is definitely not a book for a mass readership.

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EQUALITY, FREEDOM, AND RELIGION by Roger Trigg, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. ix + 184, £ 25, hbk*

Has modern liberal democracy become intolerant of religion? Have secular individualists corrupted the very religious tradition from which modern society draws its strength? Are irreligious humanists replacing eternally valid principles of law and social organisation with relativistic incoherence? These issues are acutely current in North America and Britain. Professor Trigg's opinion is clear: religion is suffering in modern society, in large part due to a legal myopia about equality. In his view attempts by liberals, humanists, secularists and philosophical relativists (he appears to use the terms interchangeably) to increase the judicial equality of individuals has led necessarily to a reduction in social freedom, particularly freedom of religion.

To support his argument, Trigg makes numerous ontological, theological, philosophical and sociological claims, with little supporting argument, throughout the book: existence after death is an essential part of human nature and true religious belief; knowledge of supernatural agency is universal; treating people equally marginalises them and their beliefs; the only defensible morality is based on eternally valid principles, to identify but a few. The case studies of recent legal decision in Britain, Canada, the United States and Australia are ambiguous regarding his basic premise that religion is being persecuted by the judiciary. Most are either split decisions, suggesting that religion is still taken seriously by the courts, or accompanied by judicial commentary which shows careful consideration of religious rights by individual judges.

Perhaps Trigg's most interesting contribution, however, is his suggestion for a novel legal concept: not the right to belief but the right of belief. 'Human rights protect people not beliefs', he points out. Although he does not entirely approve of the language of rights in its post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment form, he suggests a remedy: adding to this vocabulary the right of belief itself – belief, as it were, as species of Dawkinsian meme which has its own ontology and stability as it is passed from generation to generation and into which each individual is born. Belief of this kind remains constant and is not even really a matter of choice by individuals no matter how much they insist it might be. It is this eternally valid belief which must be protected in law. 'It is absurd', he claims, 'for justice not only to refuse to favour people, but also ideas, beliefs or principles'.

So beliefs themselves should be attributed rights. But unlike people, all beliefs cannot be considered equal. 'A respect for diversity of belief must ultimately