Nielsen Outlines Some Basic Tenets To Tillich's Ideas

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No philosopher of religion or theologian has had wider influence in the United States than Professor Paul Tillich of Harvard. The popular acclaim given to his ideas by television and the national magazines hardly begins to suggest his profundity. Rice is especially fortunate to have him as guest during his only free week this spring—the Harvard Easter recess.

Tillich came to the United States as a refugee from Nazi tyranny. He lives in two worlds not only geographically (he now prefers to write in English), but intellectually. He has been subject to criticism from two directions because he attempts to relate philosophy and religion, without destroying either!

TILLICH IS KNOWN popularly as the theologian of psychiatrists and artists. What can such a diverse designation mean? He starts always with the situation. In this sense he is an existentialist. "What are the deeper dynamics of artistic creativity and moral life?" he asks. Besides the situation, Tillich is interested in larger meanings and as a philosopher criticizes any too simple answer.

Tillich's other concern is faith. He wishes to conceive of religion in its fullest outreach. All men have faith, by which he means "ultimate concern" in one form or another. The question is not whether men will believe but only what. On the other hand, religion and faith are not the same. Tillich is a critic as well as a friend of institutional religion.

THE IDEA OF GOD in Tillich's theology requires special explanation. He says that he means to "go beyond" theism. His position is not as extreme as it first appears. Tillich means to say—among other things—that God is not an object or simply a being. He is instead, Being Itself, the ground (source of life) and abyss

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(mystery). God alone is the reality to which man can give himself fully. Ultimate loyalty to any other object is sin.

Tillich describes God as “symbol.” It must be emphasized that he does not use this term to designate unreality or myth, but the reverse. Rather, he offers a critique of literalism. A symbol participates in but is not equal with the reality for which it stands. This is a critique of both nominalism and positivism. Similarly, Tillich’s idea of the demonic is symbolic.

PROFESSOR TILLICH’s evening lectures are for the general Houston community. His morning presentation will be limited to faculty and students. He will speak in Hamman Hall, Tuesday at 10 am, Wednesday at 10 and Thursday at 9. The faculty has received a memorandum from Dr. Croneis’ office stating that classes may be dismissed.

Students will find an unusual but profound approach in Tillich’s addresses. All that he has to say will not be understood at once, although he is clear enough for comprehension. Professor Tillich’s books are available at the Rice Campus Store in paperback editions. His Dynamics of Faith and The Courage To Be are especially recommended as introductions to his thought.