

The Thinking of the Ages

Main Currents in Modern Political Thought, by John H. Hallowell, Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984. ix + 759 pp. \$18.75.

PROFESSOR JOHN H. HALLOWELL'S book was first published in 1950 by Henry Holt and Company, Inc., and is now republished by another publisher. The book is classified as a textbook, but it is much more than that. Normally a textbook is a compilation of facts (the "cold dope") that is given to undergraduates to learn (memorize). It does not usually seek to interpret anything and is supposed to be "objective," that is, devoid of value judgments or personal involvement. Hallowell's book is not a textbook in that sense. It is a treatise in political theory. It is a very ambitious project that surveys the leading thinkers from Plato and Aristotle to the present. It covers a vast amount of material. The presentation is objective in the best sense in that it surveys the whole of man's thought and not some unrepresentative part or parts. There are many lengthy quotations that give the reader the feel as

well as the substantive content of the author's perspective. The arguments made require an intellectual effort and a good memory. In all these respects Hallowell deserves our heartfelt compliments. It is not easy to produce a work that does an effective job of informing the reader of the thinking of the ages.

There is another characteristic of Hallowell's book that is not to be found in most political science textbooks — not even in political theory where it is more difficult to avoid revealing one's own position and yet also be "objective." I refer to the Christian thread that runs throughout the book. Hallowell is a Christian and has no compunction in making it plain. And he refrains from doing what so many political scientists do: to omit a writer because he is a Christian; or to omit that part of a writer's book because it contains Christian concepts and insights; or to misrepresent a writer's meaning because he himself knows nothing about Christianity.

It must have been difficult back in 1950 to find a publisher who would accept this manuscript. The prevailing mood of the political science profession was a mixture of indifference and hostility. A young and

avowedly Christian political scientist was likely to be penalized as to salary raises, promotion in rank, attainment of tenure, and invitations to participate in professional meetings. As a young instructor in the late twenties, I heard a paper entitled "The Place of God in Twentieth-Century Political Thought." I believe it was the first time that God appeared on the program of the American Political Science Association. The paper was not very good, but it led to an extensive discussion of what proofs we have that God exists. The discussion was futile and I made the comment that one of the reasons Jesus Christ came into the world was to deliver us from discussions such as these. The comment was not well received. In spite of an unfriendly academic atmosphere, Hallowell's Christianity did not stop him professionally. He became a full professor at Duke University, whose academic reputation is of the best, and he was chairman of its department of political science part of the time. And now, thirty-five years later, his survey of political thought is republished.

Hallowell himself is erudite in the best sense of the term. The number of thinkers who come within his scrutiny is amazing, and he does a very good job of analyzing their strengths and weaknesses. I must, however, point to one exception. That exception is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for whom Hallowell seems to have a visceral aversion. It is true that much of Rousseau's thought is bad, *e.g.*, that human nature is intrinsically good, that all discipline is ruinous individually and collectively, *et cetera*. It is also true that his personal life was beneath contempt. But a beautiful flower can grow and bloom on a manure pile. In this case that flower is Rousseau's General Will. The General Will utterly rejects any merely numerical majority rule. The only majority that counts is one where only the common good is considered and selfish interest is totally absent; where each voter thinks only his own thoughts and is neither bought nor brainwashed. A majority of this kind is found by canceling out the individual differences and the remainder is the pure

General Will. Such a majority is, of course, nonexistent. It is an ideal toward which we may aspire. Like all ideals it is a standard of measure, a kind of compass that tells us where we are going. When we think of the kind of majorities that are cast these days and the infinite forms of corruption that vitiate almost every election, Rousseau's General Will is a welcome beacon.

If we were to omit consideration of Hallowell's last two chapters, we would get the impression that his survey of the world's stream of thought is extremely pessimistic: that Plato and Aristotle lacked a Christian concept of the transcendental; that the Enlightenment overly admired reason and even deified it; that natural law lost its divine mooring and got mired in empiricism and positivism; that the romantic reaction got lost in the excesses of emotionalism and sentimentality; that communism erred in all its fundamental assertions; that fascism appears to be one of the most pernicious and pervasive forms of human degradation. Adding more thinkers and movements would only clutter up a depressing mass of detail corroborating the degeneration of human thought. This degeneration is not smooth but has its ups and downs and zigzags in its tragic way downward. I cannot find fault with Hallowell's strictures. He is right. But he could have emphasized more of the positive aspects of his thinkers' ideas.

The pessimistic effect of Hallowell's survey is only partially corrected in the last two chapters. His position is perfectly clear: "Only through a return to faith in God, as God revealed Himself to man in Jesus Christ, can modern man and his society find redemption from the tyranny of evil." Many other quotations could be cited whose meaning is as unambiguous and forthright as the preceding statement. What troubles the Christian reader is that Hallowell, quite rightly, points out that the church and the theologians have in the past and continue in the present to exhibit serious failings in thought and deed.

He divides his analysis into surveys of

liberal Protestantism, Neo-Orthodoxy, ecumenism (he does not use the name), Roman Catholicism, and Anglicanism. He goes through the several forms of Christianity with the same sharp scalpel he applies to secular thought. He rejects liberal Protestantism for confusing the Gospel with social programs and picks Walter Rauschenbusch as its representative. As for Neo-Orthodoxy, he chooses Reinhold Niebuhr rather than Karl Barth or Emil Brunner. That is an unfortunate choice. Not only did Niebuhr write many books but he also wrote numerous articles in journals on just about every political and socio-economic issue. But *which* Reinhold Niebuhr is he talking about? Hallowell gives some help in choosing *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Niebuhr's greatest work) and *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* from among his changing views. Basically, Hallowell points out the two most serious flaws in Niebuhr's theology: an overemphasis of Original Sin and an underemphasis of the Providence of God.

Considerable sympathy is shown in the treatment of Roman Catholicism. Hallowell has a high opinion of Augustine and Aquinas, but he does not suggest "that we go back to the Middle Ages in any sense except a spiritual one." The great thing about the Middle Ages is that it "was God-centered rather than man-centered." On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church has allowed itself to be too closely associated with political regimes like Franco's Spain. It has clearly declared that communism and membership in the Church are incompatible. And yet: "The resolution of the Church in taking this stand is admirable but one cannot help wondering why similar action was not taken against Fascism."

His support of Anglicanism, of which he is a communicant, is based largely on its willingness to affirm principles without

treating their application as absolutes and to declare that the Christian faith can raise the level of all political and economic programs without identifying itself with any one of them. Much of the Christian witnessing is to be done by individuals whom the church has the duty to nurture and equip. Not all Anglicans agree with Hallowell's point of view and neither do all non-Anglicans agree with him. Nevertheless, it is the common patrimony of all authentic Christians regardless of denomination.

One thing leaves the reader dissatisfied with this excellent survey of political thought: the place of conservatism in the spectrum of present-day politics. There is little evidence as to how the author feels about conservatism. We must remember, of course, that this book was first published in 1950, when magazines like *Modern Age* and *National Review* did not exist and many conservative writers had not yet published enough to form what one might call a movement. Even European conservatives like Edmund Burke somehow do not come through here as significant contributors to political thought. Perhaps Hallowell did not regard them as sufficiently influential to deserve extensive treatment, or perhaps he does not have any hope in a purely political movement. Nevertheless, contemporary conservatism is important and holds out hope to those appalled by the kind of unsound thinking manifested in all social and cultural areas. Modern conservatism is congruent with Christianity, goes to the roots of our troubles, and is promoted by thinkers of intellectual and spiritual stature. Conservatives are asking for a world that is more stable, more peaceful, more in line with the best of human thought — a world that contains the glimmerings of the Kingdom of God.

— Reviewed by René Williamson