

## Man, His World, and His God

**"The Coming World Civilization"** (Harper. 210 pp. \$3.75) and **"The Meaning of Immortality in Human Experience,"** (Harper. 263 pp. \$3.50) by **William Ernest Hocking** are two of the most recent books by this distinguished philosopher-theologian who celebrated, on August 10, his eighty-fifth birthday. Henry Pitt Van Dusen, who reviews Dr. Hocking's long career, is the president of Union Theological Seminary.

By Henry Pitt Van Dusen

JUST over forty-five years ago, a volume appeared which proclaimed to all with eyes to see that a new luminary had arisen in the American philosophical firmament, then dominated by the Harvard constellation of Royce, James, Palmer, Münsterberg, and Santayana.

The writer was not young, almost forty; he had devoted some years to engineering before turning to Harvard College and philosophy. But he was comparatively unknown, having just returned from an apprenticeship on the West Coast to an assistant professorship at Yale. It is doubtful if any first book of an American thinker has so immediately and securely established its author within the front rank of his profession. Sixteen months after publication, a fifth printing was required. And by then the writer had been added to the Harvard galaxy as Alford Professor of Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy, and Civil Polity. The budding philosopher was William Ernest Hocking. "The Meaning of God in Human Experience" was hailed as, and remains, one of the most original, profound, and enduringly important (though currently neglected) works of this century in the borderland between philosophy and theology. There are many, of whom the present reviewer is one, who would bear grateful testimony to its determinative influence upon their minds and faith.

To a remarkable degree, this initial volume forecast Hocking's intellectual pilgrimage down the years and anticipated both the cast and the conclusions of his thought. Its close to 600 pages were marked by a radical novelty in perspective, a comprehensiveness of insight and understanding, and a distinctive grace of both mind and expression which were to characterize every subsequent contribution from his pen. Its philosophical stance may be identified as a critical synthesis of the truths of both idealism and pragmatism in the loftier apprehensions of mysticism. But its dominating interest was not in the categories or contentions of the schools but always in the testimonies of experience with their metaphysical implications.

On an early page of this first "Meaning" appeared the startling statement: "Unlimited cooperation



Dr. Hocking—"final gifts from . . . a fellow-pilgrim."

with God in world-making we have" (p. xvii). At its close stood the hardly less unexpected declaration: "Religion . . . is the forerunner of international law; because it alone can create the international spirit, the international obligation," to which was appended the footnote: "We require a world-religion just because we do not require, nor wish, a world-state." Midway in its discussion was

the dictum: "The prospect of individual immortality must be gained if at all by the same painstaking scientific and metaphysical enquiries as justify our confidence in human welfare." Thus were anticipated the three concerns which, among many others, have chiefly preoccupied Hocking's attention in the decades since—world-order, human destiny, the role of religion in relation to both.

Now, close to half a century later and on the eve of his eighty-fifth birthday, Dr. Hocking has gathered into two comparatively modest volumes his life's reflections on these great themes. "The Coming World Civilization" sets forth his hope for the future of civilization; it centers in a partnership of the great religions through "the growing unity of their unlosable essences, the understanding acceptance of variety, and the quiet convergence of purpose in the identity of a historic task." Two lectures on immortality delivered twenty years ago and published then as "Thoughts on Death and Life" (1937) have been revised and combined with a previously unpublished lecture on "The Relativity of Death" (1942) under the new title "The Meaning of Immortality in Human Experience." This title "has intentional reference" to his first published work: "Like that earlier book, it intends to assert that present human experience has something to say about matters commonly regarded as out of the range of empirical knowledge." Here is sound self-disclosure of the determinative context which has enveloped his most important inquiries across the years and binds his writing from the initial page of the first "Meaning" to the final sentence of this most recent "Meaning": the significance of the loftiest and most delicate *experience* of the great religious realities for our understanding of and confidence in their *validity*.

Characteristically, each volume concludes with a personal "Epilogue," pointing beyond present apprehension and encouraging the hope for more momentous disclosures still to be expected from enlarging experience. The last word on human destiny is: "If, in death, some fragment of the beatific vision should be our lot, arresting and beckoning the passing spirit . . . it would be indeed a glimpse of eternity, and a oneness with the One . . . It would be at once self-recovery, remembrance, and the con-

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## From Summit to Survival

**W**HENEVER the world has been in serious trouble an inevitable demand has gone up for the leaders to get together. The universal theory seems to be that if only the men at the top can be made to sit around the same table the basis for enduring peace can be achieved.

In our time, however, it is not enough to convene the peak personalities. It becomes necessary to convene the peak ideas as well. Peace today is not to be found just by making a trip to some magic mountain, but in putting tall thoughts and purposes to work. The credentials of the participants must be represented not by their titles or ribbons but by their ability to create a totally new way of life among the nations in order that people may continue to exist on this earth.

If a summit meeting produces just a new set of improvised arrangements or understandings to allocate spheres of influence to certain nations, then the summit becomes just another low-level approach to high problems. True, any agreement may produce a respite from the big black headlines, and people may not twitch in anticipation of the next news bulletin; but the world will not stand on the firm ground on which an enduring peace will have to be built.

Against this background, the major problem today is not the existence of American troops in Lebanon or Soviet troops in Hungary. It is the lack of a world organization strong enough to prevent national armed forces from being sent anywhere—as well as to prevent situations from developing that bring national armed forces into play.

In a larger sense, no summit meeting can justify the hopes of the world's peoples unless it attempts to deal with the overriding fact of the twentieth century: the fact that absolute national sovereignty cannot create a workable peace, cannot ensure the cause of freedom, cannot serve the purposes of an evolving world. Indeed, absolute national sovereignty is the fuel which feeds world anarchy and the crises that are bound up deep within it. The ideological differences between Communism and democracy make the anarchy volatile; but it would be a mistake to suppose that if only the ideological conflict could be settled, peace would be the automatic result. The Middle East could erupt in a world war because of the world power struggle— independent of ideologies. The United States went into Lebanon because a surging Arab nationalism threatened our vital interests in that area. Similarly, a deep cleavage within the Communist world itself could touch off a world war. The Soviet Union and Communist China are not being drawn together by events but tend to be pulled apart. Tito of Yugoslavia has become a rallying ground for independent Socialist states, a fact which Communist China, even more than the Soviet Union, seems unwilling to countenance. The clash of conflicting national interests between the Soviet Union and the United States transcends the ideological differences, though the ideological differences are real enough and give power and momentum to the basic divergences on the national level.

It is not easy, of course, for the men at the top to tell each other that they must create and then give way

to a higher constituted authority, but this is the nature of the problem. Nor is it easy for them, as the highest representatives of absolute sovereignties, to propose a pooling of sovereignty. But easy or hard, this is the price of a workable peace.

The national leaders might consider why it is believed to be unsound for individual citizens to be allowed to possess firearms, but perfectly proper for the nations themselves to possess the means for rubbing out 600,000 years of human evolution. Until nuclear weapons and the means of mass destruction are outlawed—indeed, until the nations establish law among themselves—the laws inside the nations can only be regarded as a primitive beginning.

**I**T MIGHT also be useful for men at the summit to consider why a summit meeting should have been necessary in the first place. If the machinery of the United Nations had been able to do the job intended for it, there would be no need for top-level meetings. If the United Nations is to survive, what is necessary is not so much the willingness of the individual nations to refer matters to the U.N. as the built-in authority of the U.N. that can act whether the nations like it or not. At present, the U.N. acts when it has the consent of the parties involved. Thus, it becomes an arbitration agency instead of a law-making and law-enforcing agency. Any policeman who is required to obtain the consent of a law-breaker before he, the policeman, can do his job is not a policeman but a supplicant. The men at the summit have the obligation to agree to a revision conference of the U.N. for the purpose of converting it from an arena of unlimited options to an organization of binding obligations.

Such a revision conference might in fact and in truth justify the use of the term, summit meeting. Its job will be to tame the nations, to define the principles of justice in the world, to bring under rigid control the nuclear arsenals, and to create the basis for the responsible administration of the affairs of the human community.

Even when we do all this, there is no guarantee that it will work. But it at least puts the resources of human intelligence and energy to work where they are most needed—in the cause of a meaningful survival.

—N. C.

