

## No Offense: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste by John Murray Cuddihy (Seabury Press; 288 pp.; \$12.95)

Jay Mechling

Much of the scholarly analysis of the nature of the American social order, especially the commentary by the "consensus school" of historians and social scientists over the past thirty years, adds up to the reinvention of Alexis de Tocqueville. A central puzzle for Tocqueville was, quite simply, "what happens to ideas and ideology in a pluralistic, democratic society?" Fortunately, the best writing in this tradition does not simply reinvent Tocqueville but finds a new and more subtly interesting way to ask his question. John Murray Cuddihy is one of the best of these latter-day Tocquevilles, offering in *No Offense* an interpretation of the American social order based not upon the Protestant ethic but upon the "Protestant etiquette."

Cuddihy's strategy (with apologies to Robert Bellah) is to turn "the civil religion" on its head and examine "the religion of civility." The real civil religion in America, says Cuddihy, is not the set of generalized, shared beliefs through which the American people interpret their history in light of a transcendent reality; the real civil religion is to give "no offense," to be "completely aware of our religious appearances to others," and to be sensitive to the code that constitutes "the social choreography of tolerance" in a pluralistic society. In Cuddihy's version of the dialectic between social (civil) interaction and ideas, ideas follow behavior. (Cuddihy borrows Martin Marty's notion of "a nation of behavers"—see his review of Marty's book of that title in *Worldview*, May, 1977.) Although Cuddihy does not dwell upon the link with his earlier *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Lévi-Strauss and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity* (1974), an underlying

assumption in *No Offense* is that the subordination of ideas to the religion of civility is uniquely a phenomenon of modernity. *No Offense* is Cuddihy's answer to Tocqueville's question about the fate of European ideas when they arrive in a pluralistic society—to wit, they are civilized, taught how to behave, tamed. What began as ideologically distinctive religions and political groups become "voluntary associations of the denominational type" in America.

Cuddihy takes his understanding of modernity and the American social order from Talcott Parsons, a rather unfashionable source in sociology these days, but one that helps Cuddihy give language to the denominational phase of the era of civility. Cuddihy devotes the bulk of *No Offense* to three case studies in the confrontation between traditional religious truth claims and the infrastructure of American pluralism. In each case—Reinhold Niebuhr for Protestantism, Father John Courtney Murray for Catholicism, and Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg for Judaism—the pattern of argument is the same. The task of these "modernizing intellectuals," as Cuddihy calls them, was to legitimate religious pluralism and to establish within their own religious traditions the notion that other religions were to be respected, not merely tolerated until they disappeared or could be converted. In skillful and sometimes witty exegesis of key texts, Cuddihy shows how Niebuhr theologized for Protestants the Jewish presence in America, how Father Murray revamped Catholic church-state theory in a way meant to preserve Catholic truth claims and at the same time make peace with American pluralism, and how Rabbi Hertzberg legitimated for American Jews a

very un-Jewish split between private experience and public behavior. Always hovering in the background are figures counterpoint to Niebuhr, Murray, and Hertzberg, figures who, as Cuddihy would have it, would not sell their birthright of religious truth claims for a mess of civility. These chapters are rich in detail, spiced by Cuddihy's occasional injection of himself into the narrative drama. (Cuddihy is/was a member of the Murray clan and has ongoing scholarly contacts with Rabbi Hertzberg.)

Readers of *No Offense* will find much in its details to provoke and annoy them, but I suspect that the lasting importance of this book will be Cuddihy's attempt to shift the terms of the conflict/consensus debate about the American social order. For, although the case studies in *No Offense* are religious, Cuddihy swiftly expands his argument to say that "the ethos of American civil politics tames European political ideologies in exactly the same way as civil religion tames the European religious ideologies." The shift Cuddihy attempts depends largely upon his reinterpretation of Parsons. The leftist critique of Parsons notwithstanding, Cuddihy's Parsons is far from being a simple-minded consensus theoretician. Parsons sees the conflicts in modern industrial societies, to be sure, but rather than depicting a monolithic class cleavage he sees "multiple lines of crisscrossing conflict on more than one axis." Such "crisscross" paradoxically promotes social solidarity. The essence of modernity is that crisscross is internalized, that individuals feel *within themselves* the multilevel cleavages and conflicts that also exist in the external world. Thus is accomplished a symmetry between modern culture and consciousness. Crisscross consciousness, in short, makes us civil. In place of genuine *Gemeinschaft*, modern Western society substitutes an *Interimssolidarität*—"a solidarity of the surface and a solidarity for the interim"—that defers community in favor of civility.

So what Cuddihy's reinterpretation of Parsons amounts to is a view of the American social order as a fragile contract to be civil to one another. Tocqueville and consensus historians like Daniel Boorstin assume a shared belief system that Bellah calls the civil religion. In contrast, Cuddihy is saying that the social order is based, not upon sharedness of ideas (a covenant), but upon a

shared, external contract that governs public behavior. With the advent of civility, says Cuddihy, "everything becomes surface. As in decorum, as in art, the appearance is the reality." The seeming consensus is not consensus at all but, in Parson's terms, merely the result of crisscross. The conflict comes *within* the individual when he must somehow reconcile traditional religious truth claims (such as the "one biblical salvation" of Protestantism, the "one true church" of Catholicism, and the "one chosen people" of Judaism) with the modernist etiquette of civility.

The two muddled parts of Cuddihy's thesis have to do with the historical time scale of civility and the desirability of civility. Cuddihy's central characters are all twentieth-century men (I must defer here the very interesting question whether women fit most models, including Parson's, of the modernization of consciousness). The relative contemporaneity of Cuddihy's case studies begs the question of the historical origins of the Protestant etiquette. There is nothing in *No Offense* to contradict the impression from *The Ordeal of Civility* that the rise of civility is linked to the forces of eighteenth and nineteenth-century modernization—namely, capitalism, science, and secularization. But exactly how are these great forces, some societal and others psychological, connected? If the infrastructure of pluralism breeds civility, as Cuddihy insists, then he owes his readers a clearer exposition of the origins of that infrastructure. Was Tocqueville observing "civility," without calling it that, or was the American pluralism of the 1830's fundamentally different from that of the 1950's?

It is instructive to compare *No Offense* with a recent book by another sociologist, Richard Sennett. Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man* (1976) is also about the effects of modernity upon the relationship between public behavior and private experience. But, as the subtitle, "On the Social Psychology of Capitalism," implies, Sennett works hard at connecting the social-psychological phenomenon to the sociological. And Sennett actually values civility, defining it as "the activity which protects people from each other and yet allows them to enjoy each other's company." Sennett, however, is talking about an eighteenth-century civility that is largely lost in the twentieth century! Whatever else its

faults, *The Fall of Public Man* makes clear value judgments about the desirability of civility. One wishes that Cuddihy would speak as plainly to this question: Which is preferable from the viewpoint of a humanistic sociology, the

*Interimssolidarität* of bourgeois civility or the *Gemeinschaft*-type community of premodern religions? Cuddihy betrays his ambivalence on this question to the end, but perhaps that ambivalence is what makes him, and us, modern.

## Quale Papa? by Giancarlo Zizzola

(Borla casa editrice; 339 pp.)

## The Final Conclave by Malachi Martin

(Stein and Day; 354 pp.; \$11.95)

### F. X. Murphy

Now that the pontificate of Pope Paul VI is ended, we witness attempts to take the measure of the institution's current significance and its portent for tomorrow. In total contrast are two recent books dealing with these questions. Giancarlo Zizzola's *Quale Papa?*—What kind of pope?—is a serious, ideologically oriented, journalistic analysis of the institution from both an historico-political and a religious viewpoint. Malachi Martin's *The Final Conclave* has all the hallmarks of a tour de force thrown together with considerable insight and imagination, but obviously aimed at taking advantage of communism as a *diabolus ex machina* now troubling a large number of Catholics.

The contrast between the origins and careers of the two authors is considerable. Both men surfaced during the opening months of Vatican Council II. Zizzola, as a young Catholic journalist in the Italian tradition, was involved with the lay-edited daily *L'Avvenire*, and he covered the day-to-day conciliar debates as well as the Church's local and international involvements. Moving into the secular press, he reported religious and cultural affairs for *Il Giorno* of Milan and wrote a well-researched study of Pope John's pontificate, *L'Utopia di Papa Giovanni*.

Malachi Martin, on the other hand, was a young Irish Jesuit educated at the University of Louvain and brought to Rome as an instructor in Semitic languages. His familiarity with the Old

Testament scene recommended him to the late Cardinal Bea, and he was used as a liaison officer with the American Jewish lobby at the Council. His publisher's intimation that he was on familiar terms with Pope John, Bea, and the future Pope Paul is highly exaggerated. In any case, his Roman sojourn was suddenly terminated, and he wrote, under the pen name Serafian, a passably competent study of Paul VI as *The Pilgrim Pope*.

Leaving the Jesuits and the priesthood, Martin settled in New York and turned out a series of books on religious culture and politics that is a strange admixture of historical and archeological fact, pseudo-ideological fancy, and just plain theological nonsense. His life of *Jesus* and his delineation of Cardinal Bea in his *Three Popes and a Cardinal* betray the wild, possibly Celtic, imaginings with which he apparently contemplates the beginnings and the current vicissitudes of the Christian experience.

Martin's recent book *Hostage to the Devil*, purporting to be the actual record of a series of exorcisms that he himself witnessed, is an outright though cleverly constructed hoax. It is reliably reported that the publisher's lawyer was shown a letter on Vatican stationery that purported to be Pope Paul's personal approval of the manuscript. The letter allegedly was in the pope's own handwriting and opened with the salutation, Caro Malachi! It is absurdly implausi-