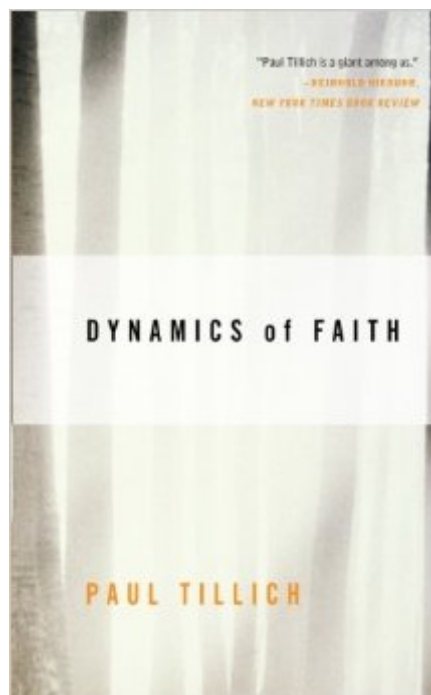


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Dynamics Of Faith (Perennial Classics)



Synopsis

One of the greatest books ever written on the subject, *Dynamics of Faith* is a primer in the philosophy of religion. Paul Tillich, a leading theologian of the twentieth century, explores the idea of faith in all its dimensions, while defining the concept in the process. This graceful and accessible volume contains a new introduction by Marion Pauck, Tillich's biographer.

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Customer Reviews

Although my philosophical interests are mostly in 20-century analytical thought and the philosophy of science, I've still read my share of theologians, including Kierkegaard, Barth, Bultmann, Rosenzweig, Marcel, Mauritian, Buber, Berdyaev, and Niebuhr, and Tillich is perhaps the greatest of them all. So I still have considerable respect for Tillich, and I thought I'd make a few comments about that. This little book (only about 140 pages) is still packed with much of the best that Tillich's subtle and profound mind had to offer. The chapter, "The Truth of Faith," is probably the greatest essay on the attempt to reconcile faith with reason, and how an intelligent man can be religious, ever written, a subject which goes back at least to St. Augustine's *The City of God* over 1500 years ago. Tillich's basic idea is that faith can become a transformative and even transcendent force in people's lives. As one reviewer here put it so perceptively, "Faith is creative precisely because we act even though we cannot be entirely sure of the outcome. This is the Faith that creates science and art, and produces miracles in everyday life. When that Faith is attached to life's ultimate concern, it becomes sacred and holy." Overall, a great book from a great philosopher that itself

perhaps transcends its subject matter.

Paul Tillich is one of the more important theologians of the twentieth century. Born into a culture being enticed away from the importance of things religious and theological in favour of science and philosophy. In particular, in the early part of the twentieth century, the philosophical school of existentialism became a strong, perhaps even the dominant force in intellectual development; it was against this (and the atheistic, nihilistic tendencies that followed) that Tillich undertook to reintroduce theology and faith as important components of human existence. Tillich, much to the consternation of many seminary students and more general readers, largely addresses the academy in the academy's language - he is very philosophical and precise in his constructions, and like many in the long tradition of German theologians, crafts his theology with his own terminology and internally-defined concepts that often make his theology difficult to follow. This text, 'Dynamics of Faith', is one of Tillich's more accessible writings, more directly relevant to the situation of individuals and congregations. Tillich here looks at what faith is, and is not, from a theological perspective, but his intention is to make this transformative for the humanity that seeks to understand God. In the first chapter, Tillich introduces one of his key terms - ultimate concern. Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned about something - God - without conditions or reservations. Ultimate concern can be religious or not, and can be misguided (people are tempted into idolatry, according to Tillich, not only by making things such as money, power and fame the objects of ultimate concern, but also by making particular ideas or views of God and religion into inappropriate ultimate concerns). In the second chapter, Tillich explores the ideas of what faith is not - faith is not merely intellectual understanding, emotional bonding, or even an act of will. Faith is rather (going back to the first chapter) an act of total personality - one's whole being is drawn to the ultimate concern. Through the remainder of the text, Tillich develops an intriguing idea of the symbolic in faith - symbols are not constructed like marketing logos, but rather assume a life of their own and participate in that to which they point, in a community context over time. Community is important to Tillich for symbols and for faith, as it is through community that we develop the language and understanding skills necessary to codify and understand such things. Tillich looks at the different disciplines of science, history, philosophy and reason, asking (perhaps echoing Pilate in a different manner) what is truth? Tillich clearly states that neither scientific nor historical truth can negate or validate the truth of faith, and vice versa. Philosophical truth is a different matter, given that the 'language' of faith, through theology, is often expressed in philosophical terms - however, even here, philosophical truth and reasoning cannot be used as a trump card. However, for the truth

of faith to be affirmed, the faith must be focussed upon the 'real' ultimate concern. Tillich often irritates modern Christians because of mistaken assumptions about what he means. In other texts (such as his massive 'Systematic Theology', also often used in higher-level seminary and graduate courses on theology), Tillich describes God as a Ground of Being, and as such, having no 'existence' as we commonly use the term; this gets reduced to the soundbite 'God does not exist', and Tillich is written off. In 'Dynamics of Faith', Tillich often refers to 'cults' and 'myths', using these terms in specific scholarly manner, to refer to religious and biblical issues and events - again, the soundbite becomes 'Tillich says that the Bible is a myth', and given the popular non-Tillichian definition of the word 'myth', again Tillich is dismissed. There is much material packed into this small text. It is worth exploring.

This is a brilliant little book. Written by Tillich in the 1950's, it analyzes and synthesizes a key element in human spirituality. This element --- Faith --- both undergirds contemporary mysticism and New Thought, and stands far ahead of the norm in both fields. A central idea in the book is the one that led to my own religious conversion experience as a Humanist: That Faith is a creative force as an action, not merely a belief. In fact, Tillich observes, "faith" that rests solely on belief and demands the elimination of doubt is the antithesis of true Faith. Faith is creative precisely because we act even though we cannot be entirely sure of the outcome. This is the Faith that creates science and art, and produces miracles in everyday life. When that Faith is attached to life's ultimate concern, it becomes sacred and holy. The book is not a product of a simple mind, and therefore is not a simple read. Yet like Martin Buber's spiritual classic I and Thou, it packs more into its 136 little pages than most books many times its size. It belongs on the permanent shelf of anyone who cares about spiritual growth, personal fulfillment and service to others.

The last time I read Tillich was over 20 years ago in the Seminary. Frankly, I read what was required, memorized enough for the tests, and then dumped it - Wow did I make a mistake! My current academic advisor / clinical supervisor structured a summer reading program of several of Tillich's books. The 'Dynamics of Faith' will challenge the reader to re-examine the depths of their emotion, focus / energy, and being. Woven through each chapter is the concept of faith as a 'total and centered act of the personal self, the act of unconditional, infinite and ultimate concern.' In our fast paced - immediate gratification - superficial age that impacts all that we do (From the foods we eat to the God we worship); Tillich challenges us to go deep, to savor, to discover the glory of The Ultimate. A 'Must Read' or 'Must Reread' for Pastors.

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