

PLAIN TALK *by Jerome Joachim*

The impact of religion on economic life and history is discussed in a very interesting booklet written by Kenneth E. Boulding, University of Michigan economics professor.

Boulding classifies religions into the prophetic and priestly types, the first characterizing the religions which seek change from the existing order and the second those which seek to retain the existing order. Without hinting that changes may be good or bad, Boulding argues that man struggles mostly to satisfy such desires as he feels. The prophetic type of religion gives him the feeling that his material desires can be increased while the priestly type of religion tends to have him substitute spiritual values in lieu of his failure to increase his material gains.

Boulding attempts to show not only the effect which religion has on economic progress but also the effect which economic opportunity has on religion. In an economy where the individual has little opportunity to improve his material well being, religions which teach him the joys to be had in the hereafter are more acceptable. America, where opportunity has been great for the individual, has developed an attitude which emphasizes this-worldly character of religion. Jesus gave Christianity a stamp of this-worldliness which it can never quite escape. The heart of Christianity is an incarnation of God in Man and a dream of a Kingdom of Heaven on earth, Boulding believes.



He contends that the reform movements in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries influenced the so-called "commercial revolution" and the prophetic religions of the Quakers and the Methodists influenced the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Whether the material progress caused the new religious con-

cept or vice versa, he admits he does not know for certain.

He concludes by saying that we have more to fear from the vast expansion of knowledge in the social sciences than we do in the natural sciences. The ominous threat of atomic or bacteriological destruction constitutes less of a threat than that of a world tyranny resting on the unshakable foundation of social-scientific knowledge of the manipulation of men. Atomic power can merely kill and maim men's bodies, where the social psychologist may be able to kill and maim their souls. In religion he hopes men will find the way, not to the suppression of their knowledge but to its redemption. He feels that oft times religion contents itself too much with the definition of individual and relatively unimportant sins and that the social scientists are apt to place too much emphasis on social sins which are not identifiable enough to trouble the individual conscience. Somewhere between the two perhaps lies the better answer.