

3-1-1997

# The Wisdom of Religious Commitment, by Terrence W. Tilley

John E. Thiel

Fairfield University, [jethiel@fairfield.edu](mailto:jethiel@fairfield.edu)

## Peer Reviewed

---

### Repository Citation

Thiel, John E., "The Wisdom of Religious Commitment, by Terrence W. Tilley" (1997). *Religious Studies Faculty Publications*. Paper 40. <http://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/religiousstudies-facultypubs/40>

### Published Citation

Thiel, John E. "The Wisdom of Religious Commitment, by Terrence W. Tilley." *Theological Studies* 58.1 (1997): 195-195.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Religious Studies Department at DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@fairfield.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@fairfield.edu).

**Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian.** While I would disagree with him on a few details, I believe he has proven his thesis.

FRANCIS A. SULLIVAN, S.J.  
*Boston College*

**THE WISDOM OF RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT.** By Terrence W. Tilley. Washington: Georgetown University, 1995. Pp. xii + 173. \$40.

Tilley offers a much-needed corrective to philosophers who treat religious claims as analyzable propositions isolated from their meaningful context in religious experience, practice, and a broader doctrinal tradition. He commends the value of a "practical" philosophy of religion, one that appreciates "phronesis" and its lived wisdom as much as it does the reasonableness of "scientia" as it walks its reflective path.

T.'s contribution to the discussion is detailed in a differentiated analysis of prudential religious practice in which a worthy, justified act of commitment is one that displays consistency with one's beliefs, follows from one's assumptions, has examined its warrants, and conforms to the standards of the agent's responsibilities. This insightful analysis of the prudential religious act will well serve philosophers of religion, systematic theologians, and ethicists.

In his last chapter, T. uses the responsibilities of the Roman Catholic theologian as a test case for the application of the prudential act. But if this is a good test case for exploring commitment, then to what degree is T.'s analysis generalizable to the vast majority of faithful practitioners who are not theologians? While I applaud T.'s defense of theological inquiry, I was puzzled by his conclusion that the "upshot of our analysis is that we cannot give an answer to the question of whether a prudent *person* can be a Catholic theologian" (151). It would seem to me that his careful formulation of the conditions of prudential action could not be accomplished theoretically or logically but only in accordance with the actions of real prudential persons, including

prudent theologians whose modeling performance requires us to answer his question in the affirmative.

These questions, though, are instigated by a very provocative and successful book that is an important contribution to the philosophy of religion and well worth reading by all who do theology.

JOHN E. THIEL  
*Fairfield University*

**HUMAN FREEDOM AND THE LOGIC OF EVIL: PROLEGOMENON TO A CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF EVIL.** By Richard Worsley. Library of Philosophy and Religion. New York: St. Martin's, 1996. Pp. viii + 222. \$49.95.

The Library of Philosophy and Religion "explores contemporary religious understandings of humanity and the universe. . . . Some of the books in this series are written for the general educated public and others for a more specialised philosophical or theological readership." The present volume presumes more than a general education in science, psychology, and philosophy. However, it has a straightforward thesis: The material conditions intrinsically required for the existence of free human beings are sufficient to make natural evils inevitable. A similar psychological argument shows that evil human acts are likewise inevitable. By providing scientific and philosophical understanding of the human before God, Worsley gives a prolegomenon to theological understanding.

His argument sounds remarkably like Plantinga's free-will defense. Indeed, he shares with Plantinga the concern to deal with this problem globally rather than requiring in principle an application to each individual instance of evil. But he finds a major fault in Plantinga's failure to recognize "that, at least for the monist, all human experience, and, hence all human possibility is inextricably interwoven with the fabric of the material, created order" (173). W. therefore explores in some detail the structure of the human brain required for freedom and the evolution-