

*[Unpublished book review from the papers of Dr. Gordon H. Clark. From the Sangre de Cristo Seminary, Clark Library]*

THE SYSTEM AND THE GOSPEL, by Kenneth Hamilton

William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., Grand Rapids, Mich.

Paper, 249 pp. \$2.45. Reviewed by Dr. Gordon H. Clark,

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This is a paperback reprint of a volume published in 1963. Nevertheless because of its excellence and because Tillich's philosophy will be debated for some time to come, a review, even an extended review is again in order.

One evidence of the influence of Hamilton's study may be found in Vox Reformata (published by the faculty of the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, Victoria, Australia) of November 1966, where Professor Klass Runia has a 33 page article on Tillich's Christology.

Runia's article is more an examination of theological details; Hamilton's work is more philosophical. Indeed it is not the easy reading of his later book, Revolt Against Heaven. THE SYSTEM requires close study.

The main theme of the present volume is easy enough to grasp: Tillich's system is not built upon the Christian faith, but is applied to it. Thus a man "is a Christian theologian in the same sense that an Australian-born anthropologist might be called an African anthropologist because he is engaged in studying tribal life in Africa" (pp. 20, 21). Underlying Hamilton's judgment on this point is Tillich's view that Christianity is a species of religion, every one of which reveals and distorts the Ground of Being his System so clearly explains.

Tillich has produced a System out of Platonic and Hegelian elements, in the mold of Schleiermacher, plus his own genius, which System determines what Christianity must mean prior to any examination of Christianity (pp. 46-48).

The ambiguities Tillich must then use to give a Christian aura to his theology, how he is pulled in two directions, his denial and his acceptance of pantheism, his failure to share candidly with the

reader either his presuppositions or his conclusions, are points Hamilton painstakingly analyses.

That the analysis is competent I not only grant, but wish to advertise. At the same time, perhaps Hamilton has overreacted to Tillich. In his opposition to the System, does he mean to disparage system? (p. 48) In his opposition to Hegelianism, does he deny that truth must mirror the order of being and contribute to that order (p. 55)?

As Hamilton so well demonstrates, Tillich's sentences are often ambiguous. In one sense such a sentence is consistent with Christianity, in another sense incompatible. I fear that sometimes, particularly in the chapter on Eros-Faith, Hamilton overreacts to deny the sentence in both its meanings. For example, Hamilton in opposing Tillich apparently quotes Barth with approval: “He does not seek Himself, but simply men” (p. 105). But this sentence seems to deny that God seeks his own glory. Another example is Hamilton's statement, “The argument ... is silent on the subject of the need to keep theology and philosophy separate” (p. 110).” Naturally a Thomist would say so; but Hamilton is not a Thomist, and therefore his remark if not overreaction, is at least a dangling assumption.

Sometimes Hamilton corrects the impression his more general denials give. When he says that Tillich's dislike of static orthodoxies is well justified (p. 228), the words imply that the “static” statements of the Bible should be reinterpreted. The following two pages warn us not to draw the implication.

But not always does he avoid disastrous implications. After rejecting Thomism he also rejects the program of “working out the philosophical implications of the Gospel one by one” (p. 237), on the flimsy excuse that this would “engage philosophers in happy disagreement until the end of time.” Such a reason would put an end to all theology as well, and science, too. It would also preclude his acceptance of “absolute paradox” (p. 239), because surely absolute paradox can produce endless disagreement too – providing disagreement is the proper word for the rejection of nonsense and unintelligibility.

Fortunately, however, Hamilton spends little time outlining his own views. He makes a thorough study of Tillich, and his analysis of Tillich's method, chapter V, on Correlation, far from being an absolute paradox, is absolutely devastating, showing Tillich's completely artificial construction and total irrelevance to Christian interests.