First Reader’s Report, by L. Harold DeWolf

26 February 1955
Boston, Mass.

DeWolf, King’s advisor, filed this report as part of the official evaluation of the first draft of King’s dissertation, “A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman.” In this report DeWolf admits that “Mr. King’s task is a difficult one,” because he tries to compare “two unusually influential theologians—the position of neither is simple and Tillich’s writing is sufficiently difficult so that there are wide differences of interpretation among his foremost admirers and critics.” He notes as the dissertation’s “most conspicuous weakness . . . the lack of an Abstract,” which King later provided.1 DeWolf concludes that King’s work demonstrated “broad learning, impressive ability and convincing mastery of the works immediately involved,” and approves the draft of the dissertation “subject to revision as indicated.”

Mr. King’s dissertation serves the purpose of showing many significant relations between two unusually influential theologians, each of whom maintains a remarkably original and unique point of view. The position of neither is simple and Tillich’s writing is sufficiently difficult so that there are wide differences of interpretation among his foremost admirers and critics. Hence Mr. King’s task is a difficult one. In general, he approaches it with broad learning, impressive ability and convincing mastery of the works immediately involved.

The First Reader has read most of the chapters, one by one, and sent his criticisms to the candidate. These criticisms, most of them formal or minor, will not be repeated here. The whole dissertation must be gone over with care for the correction of the form. Mr. King has shown himself well able to carry out this assignment.

The most conspicuous weakness of the present draft is the lack of an Abstract. This is the most important part of a dissertation. It must be prepared and presented sufficiently early so that it can be criticized and revised before the Final Draft is due. The candidate is warned that often several revisions of the Abstract are required. Ample time must be allowed.

Within the main body of the dissertation, my chief criticism is the lack of a clear statement setting forth the presuppositions and norms employed in the critical evaluation. Generally the main norm seems to be adequacy in expressing the historic Christian faith—or perhaps the religious values of historic Christianity. Sometimes it is a more inclusive intellectual or philosophical adequacy. The norms should be more explicit in systematic statement. If it could be shown that Tillich and Wieman themselves claim to measure up to the standards by which they are here criticized, that demonstration would greatly strengthen the criticism by showing it to be internal and not merely external.

Some further criticisms of specific passages follow, with page references.

P. 219. Are these procedures of Tillich and Wieman actually parallel to Anselm's ontological argument? It should, at least, be pointed out that Anselm sought to prove the existence of the being with richest conceivable attributes, while Wieman and Tillich seek to prove by definition "a being of minimum specifications." In other words, Anselm sought to prove by a definition with maximum specification of attributes, while Tillich and Wieman seek to prove by definitions with minimum specifications.

P. 224, section 3. Do not most theologians think that God is ground or author of all being and source of all good? How does Tillich's dilemma regarding evil differ from the dilemma of other theists?


P. 247, 8th to 6th line from the bottom. Relate to the doctrine of personal immortality?

When revised in response to these criticisms and to self-criticism, Mr. Martin's work promises to be an excellent and useful scholarly achievement.

TFmS. SPS.


Second Reader's Report, by S. Paul Schilling

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Boston, Mass.

Schilling concludes that King's first draft is "competently done—carefully organized and systematically developed," showing "sound comprehension and critical capacity." 1 Schilling's criticisms emphasize "stylistic improvement," as well