Church and Its Mission: A Shattering Critique from the Third World (Book Review)

James A. De Jong

Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege

Recommended Citation


Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol3/iss4/10

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.
Hopkins engaged in an impressive amount of research in order to produce this study. Although extensively using the published Armstrong literature, he was handicapped by the current nature of his subject and more particularly by the uncooperative attitude of the Worldwide Church of God officialdom; but he did succeed in achieving one research triumph—a personal interview with Garner Ted Armstrong, son of Herbert W. and heir-apparent to the empire. The result has been that most of the first-hand information concerning the inside workings of the organization has come from former members and officials who would tend to have a strong anti-Armstrong bias, making objectivity, a prime goal of the author, harder to achieve.

Given the inherent and artificially erected difficulties of dealing with this subject, Hopkins has, however, produced an extremely informative and largely dispassionate examination of the Armstrong movement. To a large extent he has allowed Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God literature to speak for themselves. He has not refrained, however, from pointing out their errors and misconceptions at various junctures. An example of this is Hopkins’ point-by-point demolition of Armstrong’s theories on British-Israelism. A valuable feature of the book is a brief summary of the teachings of the Worldwide Church of God (i.e., of Herbert W. Armstrong) and of the doctrines that it shares or derives from the Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Mormons in appendices at the end of the book.

For the most part, the book reads well, but it has a tendency occasionally to become somewhat tedious, as certain points are remade and teachings reiterated, although admittedly in different contexts.

This minor criticism aside, The Armstrong Empire is a solid, well-documented and illuminating study of one of the more important deviant sectarian movements in the United States today.
lishing churches, for in Part I he himself stresses 
the liturgical-missionary character of the church as 
God's instrument for reconciling the world to Him.

"God's Mission and the Church's Tensions," 
Part III, appraises the increasing polarization 
between certain evangelicals in the missionary 
movement and many World-Council-of-Churches- 
oriented mission figures. Several chapters discuss 
in depth the theology of the liberation approach 
to missions as articulated by Latin Americans. 
Peter Beyerhaus, on the evangelical side, is 
severely criticized for his polemical attitude 
toward ecumenical efforts in mission. Part III is 
probably as fair and comprehensive an assessment 
of discussions in missions today as has appeared 
anywhere.

Costas is a third-world churchman from 
Costa Rica. He is a rising star on the missiologi- 
cal horizon, whose theological brilliance and 
whose painstaking effort to be Biblical as well as 
relevant in his writing make him a figure to be 
read seriously by anyone who wishes to stay in- 
formed in the area of missions.


Helmut Thielicke is First Dean of the 
Theological Faculty and Professor of Systematic 
Theology at the University of Hamburg, Ger-
many. He is the author of several books, such as 
Between God and Satan, A Little Exercise for 
Young Theologians, Out of the Depths, and The 
Silence of God.

Until the publication of his Theological 
Ethics, Thielicke was best known in this country as a preacher. According to G. W. Bromiley, 
translator of the book under consideration, 
Thielicke's "real vocation, however, has been 
that of a theologian, and it is no secret that he 
has been discontented rather than flattered that 
his incidental activity should have become the 
basis of his reputation. The present work should 
help to correct the situation" (p. 5).

The Evangelical Faith is the first of a three- 
volume dogmatics. The second volume will 
consider the doctrines of God and of Christ, 
and the third will deal with the doctrines of 
the Holy Spirit, the Church, and eschatology.

The Evangelical Faith bears the subtitle 
Prolegomena: The Relation of Theology to 
Modern Thought Forms. This subtitle is signi- 
ficant, for it clearly describes what Thielicke 
endeavors to do in this first volume. As the 
author himself states in the preface:

This first volume of a systematic 
thought will attempt clearance work 
in a cluttered situation. It will survey 
current debates from a defined stand- 
point, try to pin down terms like myth 
or death of God which are often 
bandied about far too freely, and seek 
to give them their true meaning. The 
attempt, then, is to get a grasp of 
modern theology, sounding out and 
preparing the ground on which to 
build. (p. 11)

But Thielicke is concerned with more than 
a grasp of modern theology. It is his purpose, 
within the context of modern theological de- 
bates, to set forth a doctrine of faith. Further, 
he is determined to articulate this doctrine of 
faith without presenting theology as anthropolo- 
by. Seeking to dissociate himself from those who 
deal with faith only as it is integrated into the 
human consciousness, Thielicke expresses inter-

test, not so much in the subject of faith, as in that 
in which faith believes and by which man is 
changed into a new creature.

Whether Thielicke succeeds in the realiza-
tion of his purpose depends not only upon what 
this volume contains, but upon that which will 
appear in the second and third volumes of this 
comprehensive work. Therefore, we eagerly 
await the appearance of those pages which 
constitute the total result of Thielicke's stated 
attempt to produce a comprehensive work.

The Idea of a Christian College—by Arthur 
F. Holmes, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 
Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975, 118 pages, $2.95 
(paper). Reviewed by Nick Van Til, Professor of 
Philosophy.

Professor Holmes writes out of the back-
ground of many years of teaching experience 
and student contact at Wheaton College. He 
packs a lot of ideas into this little volume. The 
subtitle, Philosophy of Christian Education for 
Laymen, is appropriate as Holmes' lucid writing