
Pro Rege

Volume 6 | Number 2

Article 6

December 1977

Alone: A Widow's Search for Joy (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Vanden Berg, Jack (1977) "Alone: A Widow's Search for Joy (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 6: No. 2, 30 - 31.
Available at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol6/iss2/6

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A quarterly faculty publication of
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

Book Reviews

by John M. Zinkand

Alone: A Widow's Search For Joy by Katie E. Wiebe, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois, 1976, 303 pages, \$4.95. Reviewed by Jack Vanden Berg, Associate Professor of English.

Katie Wiebe's husband died just two months after they had moved to Kansas, far from relatives and friends in Canada. *Alone* is an account of Katie Wiebe's spiritual pilgrimage from "blank bewilderment" and anguished acceptance of her loss to the discovery of strength from God to cope with her problems. In that pilgrimage she also found a new career and an increasing confidence that God approved of her efforts to make her own contributions to life. A graduate of Mennonite Brethren Bible College and of Tabor College, she earned an M.A. from Wichita State College, worked as an editorial assistant at the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House and has been an assistant professor of English and journalism at Tabor College since 1967.

Alone is divided into three parts and an epilogue. Part one contains a short account of Walter's illness and death and introduces the major considerations of the book: the second-class status of widows in society and in the church, the loss of identity, the problems of loneliness, bitterness, insecurity, and guilt feelings. Part two devotes a chapter to each of these and related problems; part three deals

with "widowhood and old age" and with trust and faith. Chapter fourteen of this last part is a brief sketch of the role of widows in the church through the ages. Although the sketch is disappointingly brief, Mrs. Wiebe points out that in the apostolic and early church, widows had an office, the ministry of prayer. In the Epilogue the author reveals that as a pastor's wife she "wondered why, if Christianity was an authentic option for women of the twentieth century, it didn't make them exciting, alive persons."

Thus, Mrs. Wiebe's struggle to define her role and identity began long before her husband's death. Happy in her role as mother, wife, Sunday School teacher, and Bible leader, she still felt an unfulfilled need—the need to contribute in her own way as a person, not as a woman or a wife. Plagued with feelings of guilt at questioning her church's definition of her role, she searched the Scriptures for light. It is this struggle and its resolution that forms the major thematic concern of *Alone*.

Although *Alone* is interesting reading, it is not without flaws. Replete with incidents and illustrative anecdotes, the flow of ideas is often impeded by the illustrations. At times the book suffers from repetitiousness, and the chapters are not all equally interesting. Nevertheless, I recommend that both sexes read it. The male reader will realize, with a shock of belated recognition, the unconscious ostracism of widows and single women in our circles. He

will realize that his church, like Mrs. Wiebe's, "pushes them out of Noah's Ark," often with the statement: "Widows are to be visited; single women are to be kept busy"—at inconsequential tasks. For the female reader, Mrs. Wiebe gives startling statistics about the probability of becoming a widow, as well as a host of excellent suggestions on preparing for widowhood and on coping with the problems that a widow faces. Throughout, the book is infused with Mrs. Wiebe's desire to know the will of the Lord in making her decisions.

Karl Marx: the Roots of His Thought, by Johan Van der Hoeven, Wedge Publishing Foundation, Toronto, 1976, 109 pages. Reviewed by John Van Dyk, Professor of Philosophy.

Close study of this careful and frequently subtle analysis of some of the early works of Marx will unquestionably repay the student of Marxist philosophy. Ever since the discovery of Marx's early works in the 1920s, the nature and development of Marxist philosophy have received considerable attention. Professor Van der Hoeven does not join the current discussions; instead, he provides us with an example of how to read these early works, both exegetically and critically. In his foreword, Van der Hoeven explains that he is going to be busy with textual analysis, and that the book "has no pretensions of being a 'study' of Marx in the sense that professional philosophers attach to that word." This may be so; nevertheless, philosophically, the result turns out to be extraordinarily rich.

Van der Hoeven begins with a consideration of the rise of German Idealism. He briefly explains the dualistic nature/freedom polarity in the thought of Kant, then goes on to describe the attempts at synthesis by post-Kantian Idealists. Particularly important in the post-Kantian tradition are the concepts "history" and "dialectic." To Hegel, for example, history implies the method of dialectic, since history, essentially a process of becoming, expresses a unity of being, being-no-more, and being-not-yet.

In the second chapter, Van der Hoeven examines the Marxist reaction to Hegel. In the annotations to his dissertation, Marx reinterprets the Hegelian notion of theory. In brief, Marx wants to see the development of theory take on a much more practical direction. This chapter is particularly important, since in it Van der Hoeven exposes some of the fundamental tensions and contradictions in the thought of

Marx.

Marx's debt to Hegel is further described in chapter 3. Van der Hoeven makes it clear that Marx works within a Hegelian framework. This is readily evident from a consideration of the Marxist notions of society and dialectical development.

Chapters 4 and 5 constitute the meat of the book. In chapter 4, Van der Hoeven critically exegetes crucial passages of Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. In this work Marx presents a critique of religion as well as of the political and social situation in the Germany of his day. Marx sees religion as an invention of men victimized by historical circumstances. Van der Hoeven shows how this view, when combined with the Hegelian conception of society and the principle of dialectic, leads Marx to enunciate the call for revolution. Chapter 5 examines several of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, namely *Estranged Labor* and *Private Property and Communism*. In these writings Marx applies the method of dialectic to the concept "labor," and further discusses the development of society towards its ultimate goal.

In the last chapter, Van der Hoeven explains some of the key notions in Marxist thought, such as "dialectic," "materialistic," and others. In a powerful epilogue, the author discusses his own conception of such central concepts as "religion," "philosophy," and "history"; but he leaves these tantalizingly undeveloped.

Van der Hoeven shows remarkable ability to think along with Marx. Typically, he will quote, restate, then stop to evaluate. He is particularly eager to expose the many tensions inherent in almost every facet of Marx's thought. Here, Van der Hoeven is generally at his best. At times, however, his assessment seems little more than a restatement of the obvious. He explains, for example, that Marx's assertion "But for man the root is man himself" is really a statement of humanism.

Actually, the book is a collection of lectures that Van der Hoeven gave at Calvin College. In the Foreword, the author says: "Apart from a number of absolutely necessary corrections, the lectures are here published as they were originally given." He then goes on to explain that this has some drawbacks, such as inevitable repetition and an absence of strict systematic-analytic exposition. I doubt if these are really major flaws. Nevertheless, the material is sometimes too condensed, and the drift of the discussion is not always clear. It would have been helpful if the main headings given in the Summary of Contents had been inserted into