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Karl Marx: The Roots of His Thought (Book Review)

John Van Dyk
Dordt College

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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

the text. Moreover, at times the language plods along and interferes with clarity, often, unfortunately, at important points. On the whole, the exposition lacks the consistent clarity one might expect from a textual-analytic approach. In fairness to the author, however, we need to remember that the writings of Marx are themselves replete with ambiguity and obscurity.

The reference to "roots" in the title of the book is somewhat vague. Precisely what does Van der Hoeven mean by "roots"? The Idealist tradition? But this he treats rather sketchily in the first chapter. The bulk of the book deals with Marx's early writings, which presumably presuppose "roots." Perhaps the book might have been more descriptively entitled *Karl Marx: the Roots of His Economic and Social Thought, or the Philosophical Roots of His Mature Thought*. Van der Hoeven seems to confirm this suggestion when he says in chapter 6: "But for all its sketchiness and its inherent problems, his philosophy is undeniably the background to his economic and social theory" (p. 97).

Despite these flaws, the book in its present form constitutes a fine introduction to the philosophy of Marx. I would especially recommend it as a text for a college course in Marxism, to be used in conjunction with, for example, the recently published *Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker.

Foundations of Christian Scholarship. Essays in the Van Til Perspective, by Gary North, editor, a Chalcedon Study, Ross House, Vallejo, California, 1976, 355 pages. Reviewed by John C. Vander Stelt, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Theology.

For addressing themselves to the crucial, intriguing, and complicated question of the possibility and nature of Christian scholarship, the authors of this publication are to be greatly commended. Under the editorship of Gary North (a disciple of John Rousas Rushdoony—founder and sole resident scholar of Chalcedon, Inc., a non-profit educational organization), eight Presbyterian scholars have made a significant attempt at demonstrating what they conceive to be the importance of C. Van Til's apologetical methodology for foundational issues in epistemology, for a number of academic disciplines, and for a reconstruction of life and culture in general.

The editor himself has applied Van Til's methodology of apologetic presuppositionalism to some basic issues in university education,

economics, sociology, and publications, whereas Rushdoony writes on the topics of common ground and psychology. C. Gregg Singer deals with history, William Blake with education, Lawrence Pratt with political science, Vern Poythress with mathematics, Greg Bahnsen with apologetics and philosophy, and John Frame with theology. Each of the authors prefaces his particular study with a long quotation taken from one of the many writings by C. Van Til on the subject of apologetics.

Except for a few obviously biased and almost unprofessional comments by the editor concerning views of certain reformed thinkers in Amsterdam, Grand Rapids, and Toronto, the manner of argumentation and the style of writing of *Foundations of Christian Scholarship* are generally attractive and even engaging. All eight writers have in no uncertain terms rejected any suggestion of a neutrality postulate as well as any hint of a religious compromise with covenant-breaking patterns of thought. It is unmistakably clear that all the contributors to this book want to think in a radically Christian manner. There is no ambiguity as to their Biblical intent and the confessional direction in which they seek to move.

This work is in my opinion somewhat defective, however, in at least one respect. The writers have not sufficiently distinguished the Biblical *foundations* for Christian scholarship from the *perspective* of C. Van Til. Whereas the former is normative, the latter is not. The specifics of Van Til's *perspective* cannot be fully understood apart from the inevitable subjectivity and historical conditionedness of also his response to the normative foundations for Christian scholarship. Whereas it is impossible to subject the *foundations* to a Biblical critique, it is possible, even mandatory, that a person's *perspective* be critically evaluated in the Light of the living Word of God.

Had these followers of Van Til done with the peculiar contents of Van Til's own presuppositions what he himself has done with the basic conceptions of other thinkers, including fellow reformed scholars, that is, subject them to a radical critique from God's Word, they would have been compelled to raise and discuss the complicated and sensitive matter of an intrusion also into Van Til's *perspective* of certain questionable (from a Scriptural viewpoint) notions—for example, Van Til's understanding of the ontological Trinity, his idealistic penchant, and his leaning toward a form of intellectualism.

I wonder whether the failure on the part of these writers to deal with this foundational question and their assumption that Van Til's