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John Vander Stelt (ed.): *The Challenge of Marxist and Neo-Marxist Ideologies for Christian Scholarship*. Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt College, 1982. viii, 280. n.p.

Despite the title, this volume is more than a series of articles on Christian and Marxist thought. It is actually a publication of the proceedings of the third session of the International Council of Institutions for Christian Higher Education (ICICHE), which was held at Dordt College August 13–20, 1981. As such, the appendices to the book contain minutes of the conference business meetings, resolutions, and other practical affairs of the Council. For the same reason, the preface informs us that ICICHE has now reorganized under the even longer title of the International Council for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (ICPCHE), and that the editor of the book, John Vander Stelt, is also the Executive Secretary of ICPCHE. But clearly, it is the eleven conference papers published in this way, and which make up the bulk of the volume, which are the focus of interest for a book review.

The first good thing about this book is its title. Though long, and a little awkward, the title allowed the articles to range over the widest possible latitude for their topics. This latitude was well used by the contributors, who covered not only the well-worn colors of the Marxist spectrum, but probed some of its seldom visited shadings as well. The articles cover not only the thought of Marx and Engels, but a wide representation of Neo-Marxist thinkers. And they everywhere show a keen recognition of the differences between the early and later thought of father-figures of Marxism, just as they show a keen appreciation of the differences between Soviet, Chinese, European, and Latin American Marxism.

In the opening, keynote, article, Sander Griffieon sets a tone of frank self-reflection on Christian scholarship when he judges Reformational philosophy not yet ready to meet the Marxist challenge. He deftly surveys the main trends in Neo-Marxist thought, and assesses their confrontation with Christianity.

The second article, by James Skillen, does almost a complete inverse of the task of the first article: it surveys some major developments in the interpretation of Christianity, and assesses their strengths and weaknesses relative to the Marxist challenge. Skillen argues that “Biblical revelation also upsets much of Christianity” and that “the Marxist challenge appears as serious as it does primarily because of the degenerate character of Christianity.” He then goes on to give an insightful and ingenious exposition of Genesis 1 and 2 relative to the biblical attitude toward justice and history.

There then follow articles on more specific topics: the background of, and present situation in, Poland; and the role of the state in religion and education in China—complete with several “wiring diagram” charts of the Chinese government. There are two articles on liberation theology, and two more on the Marxist and Christian views of poverty and wealth—one of which is specifically dedicated to the situation among central African nations.

The closing set of articles is devoted to the Marxist theory of education, and begins with a splendid survey of the topic by Klaus Bockmuehl. Both in respect of the

thinkers covered, and the clarity of his exposition and criticism, Bockmuehl has produced a gem on a topic all too often neglected in contemporary treatments of Marxism. His article is followed by responses from Bernard Zylstra and Hendrik Hart.

In my opinion, these articles are a treasury of frank, incisive evaluation and insightful critique. They are not, however, written at the level of the average pew-dweller. They assume an acquaintance with the basics of Marxism and with the main trends of Neo-Marxism. Nor is it the case that every Christian would feel completely at home with the perspective from which the criticisms are offered. To appreciate that perspective, a reader would have to be at least slightly acquainted with the Dutch Calvinist tradition in Christianity, and with some of the recent philosophical thought inspired by it.

But for any Christian meeting those requirements, and who is interested in the confrontation of the faith with Marxism, this book is a must. In fact, this book, preceded by a reading of Johan Vander Hoeven's *Karl Marx: The Roots of His Thought*, could constitute a first-rate short course in Marxism from a Christian perspective.

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¹Westminster Theological Seminary. 1984; 2002. *Westminster Theological Journal Volume 46*. Westminster Theological Seminary