

**Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular and Christian Options** by Herman Dooyeweerd, translated by John Kraay and edited by Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra. Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979 pp. xii, 228. Reviewed by Keith C. Sewell.

The publication of this volume constitutes an important addition to the Dooyeweerd corpus in English. It represents the most extensive text since *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (4 volumes 1953-58), the most significant since *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (1960) and the first volume since *The Christian Idea of the State* (1968). As a translation the text of this work flows freely and the content is rich with detail and sustained argumentation, and as such should stimulate further the growing interest in this important thinker.

As the introductory sections indicate, the contents of this volume were presented in the context of the *doorbraak* (break-through) movement that rose to a high prominence in the Netherlands in the immediate post-war period. The movement was promoted by the *Nederlandse Volksbeweging* (Netherlandic Peoples' Movement) and it sought to set aside the hard-won religious pluralism that had previously come to expression in many aspects of Dutch life from the time of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) onwards.

For Dooyeweerd the *doorbraak* programme did not merely raise questions exclusive "to the theoretical sphere of scholarship" but rather also issues that vitally concern "the religious direction of our life" (*Roots* pp. 6, 5). Nevertheless Dooyeweerd shuns what he calls the "dangerous impulse of journalistic superficiality" (p. 55) and maintains a level of discussion that, although it does not in his view constitute a "learned academic discourse" (p. 14), demands serious application on the part of the reader. The depth of argumentation would certainly not be regarded as 'popular' in New Zealand, but then again conformity to the prevailing ethos in such matters is not our Christian calling.

This volume is redolent with themes already familiar to those who have studied this author's works available in English versions. The argument opens with an exposition of the antithesis (pp. 1-9) and then proceeds to a discussion of what Dooyeweerd calls the 'four religious ground motives' that have dominated, and inter-acted in, western culture at least since the age of Classical Greece onwards (pp. 9 ff).

These ground motives are presented as –

1. The "form – matter" ground motive of Greek antiquity in alliance with the Roman idea of *imperium*.
2. The scriptural ground motive of the Christian religion: creation, fall and redemption through Jesus Christ in communion with the Holy Spirit.
3. The Roman Catholic ground motive of "nature-grace" which seeks to combine the two motives mentioned above.
4. The modern humanistic ground motive of "nature-freedom", in which an attempt is made to bring the three previous motives to a religious synthesis concentrated upon the value of human personality." (pp. 15-16)

The 'form-matter' ground motive is discussed first (pp. 16-36), with special attention being given to its debilitating influence on much Christian thinking (pp. 28-36).

These latter observations serve to introduce an extended discussion of the scriptural ground motive of creation, fall and redemption (pp. 28 ff). Here Dooyeweerd considers such important questions as the biblical view of soul and body (pp. 31-36), common grace – which should never be understood apart from the redemptive work of Christ (pp. 38-39), Sphere Sovereignty (pp. 40-58), the Christian view of history (pp. 42-44, 49-58, 61-87) and the structure of faith and its significance for cultural formation (pp. 88-110). Those who have made the serious assertion that Dooyeweerd proposed to set aside the scriptures as God's Word written would do well to study these passages with special attention (especially pp. 95-97).

After this discussion of the Christian ground motive the exposition turns to the nature-grace synthesis as espoused by medieval Christendom and carried forward to the present day by both Roman Catholicism and Scholastic Protestantism (pp. 111-143. Protestant readers should note especially pp. 139-143). Hereafter the discussion turns towards the emergence of the modern humanistic spirit with its nature-freedom ground motive (pp. 148 ff).

The final portion of the book engages in a highly suggestive discussion of the dialectical instabilities inherent in the humanistic ground motive as they have come to historical expression. Special attention is paid to the Renaissance and early modern periods (pp. 148-162), the economic and other doctrines of Classical Liberalism (pp. 162-168, 195-197), and the emergence of Romanticism (pp. 175-182), modern science (pp. 182-185) and modern democratic way of life (pp. 168-174, 185-188). The work concludes with an important section on the rise of modern sociology as a response to the romanticism of the restoration period (pp. 189-218).

An extended discussion of all or even some of the issues raised in this book by Dooyeweerd would not be in place – or even possible – in this Newsletter, but a number of observations are perhaps not out of order. Dooyeweerd does not engage in any exposition of how his concept of ground motives might apply to the construction of historiographical narratives with specific respect to the latter's subject matter and not simply with respect to what he calls his transcendental critique of all theoretical thought which deals with the universally obtaining conditions without which all theoretical thought (the science of history included) would not be possible. In this context it should be noted that the transcendental critique and ground motive formulations emerged at relatively late stages in Dooyeweerd's philosophical development.

Readers should be aware that a start has been made on gaining an understanding of Dooyeweerd's development by the translator of *Roots*, John Kraay, in his 'Successive Conceptions in the Development of the Christian Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd (I)' (*Philosophia Reformata* 44(1979): 137-149).

This volume also contains a number of statements expressive of Dooyeweerd's problematic formulations concerning the eternal/ everlasting character of the human soul (p.43, cf pp. 33, 35 & 90). In this context reference should be made to the important discussions of this and related questions by H. Hart in 'The Problems of Time, An Essay' (*Philosophia Reformata* 38 (1973):30-42) and Pete J Steen in 'The Problem of Time and Eternity in its Relation to the Nature-Grace Ground Motive' in *Hearing and Doing* edited by John Kraay (again!) and A.Tol, Toronto: Wedge 1979, pp. 135-148.

From questions of content we now move to questions of provenance. As we read on p. iv, "this book originally appeared as a series of articles in the weekly *Nieuw Nederland* from August 1945 to May 1948. They were first published as a book by J.A. Oosterhooft, editor, in *Vernieuwing en bezinning om het reformatorische grondmotief* (Zutphen: J.B van den brink, 1959)." However, English language readers should be aware that this is *not* a complete translation of *Vernieuwing en bezinning*, nor is it a complete translation of all the articles that Dooyeweerd published in *Nieuw Nederland*. When using this translation the following considerations should be kept in view:

1. There are two editions of *Vernieuwing en bezinning* both published in Zutphen by J.B van den brink in 1959 and 1963 respectively. The second edition includes two additional sections (pp. 265-280) being reprints of two articles *not* originally published in *Nieuw Nederland* and *not* included in the *Roots* translation.

2. The first (1959) edition of *Vernieuwing en bezinning* divides its reprinted *Nieuw Nederland* articles into four chapters as follows: Chapter One, 27 articles, pp. 1-110; Chapter Two, 10 articles, pp. 111-142; Chapter Three 16 articles, pp. 143-192; and Chapter Four, 18 articles pp. 193-264. Chapters One to Three (53 articles), pp. 1-192 correspond to *Roots* pp. 1-202. The 18 articles reprinted as Chapter Four of *Vernieuwing en bezinning* are *not* included in the *Roots* translation. The 'Editorial preface' of the latter (p. xi) informs us that these passages were omitted in view of their specific reference to the "immediate issues within the Dutch socioeconomy."

3. The 'Editorial Preface' of *Roots*, however, refers to a total of 58 translated articles. As indicated above, Chapters One to Three of *Vernieuwing en bezinning* reprint a total of 53 articles only. The additional 5 articles translated in *Roots* comprise articles not reprinted in either edition of *Vernieuwing en bezinning*. These are translations of the article 'Standen en klassen in de samenleving' (*Nieuw Nederland* 19 March, 26 march, 8 April, 13 May 1948 in *Roots* pp. 206-218).

The omission of the 18 articles mentioned in the penultimate paragraph above from the present translation is to be deeply regretted, even after we have acknowledged that Christian publishers in North America cannot ignore the proclivities of the American Christian College market. If at all possible we would have preferred to have a translation of these articles with the requisite elucidatory editorial footnotes. English-language readers desperately need a more detailed appreciation of the general cultural *milieu* in which Dooyeweerd worked and to which he responded. Whilst the 'Editorial Preface' (pp. xi-xii) clearly states that the present work does not constitute a "permanent edition of Dooyeweerd's journalistic efforts in *Nieuw Nederland*", the omission of these 18 articles does seriously impair what would have otherwise have been the full usefulness of this volume.

An example might serve to sustain this observation. The English translation of L. Kalsbeek's introduction to Dooyeweerd's philosophy published as *Contours of a Christian Philosophy* (Toronto: Wedge, 1975) contains the following translated passage from *Vernieuwing en bezinning*:

"Has not man himself appeared on the world's stage after a lengthy process of development of the earth, the plants and the animals? And is there not a marked difference between modern cultural man and the extinct races of men, the fossil remains of which have been unearthed?... Are there not transitional forms between man and animal which make it probable that man is of animal descent." (*Contours* p. 88, Dutch original p. 85).

This passage, which has puzzled not a few readers of *Contours*, is taken from an article published in *Nieuw Nederland* on 1 November 1946. The passage is reprinted on p. 238 of *Vernieuwing en bezinning*. However, as it is one of the series of articles reprinted in Chapter Four of the latter this passage and its context will not be found translated in *Roots*. In fact, reference to the original text indicates that Dooyeweerd is not here giving his own view, but outlining a view from which he dissents. This is not clear from Kalsbeek, and it is regrettable that the *Roots* translation does not provide an opportunity to clear up a potentially serious misunderstanding.

Moreover, the present work lacks the apparatus that we might have expected to have been made available in the translation of such important material. We might well have hoped for marginal references to the pagination of the originals. Such references are a standard feature of scholarly translations, the outstanding translation of Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, as *Being and Time* by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973) being a good example. In addition, the references to Dutch terms in *Roots* (pp. 9, 53, 95 etc.) point to the need for some sort of translation table such as is provided on pp. 507-508 of Theodore's Plantinga's translation of Theodore de Boer's masterly *The Development of Husserl's Thought* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978).

Such omissions from *Roots* may be justified upon the grounds that this volume does not purport to be a scholarly and definitive text, but they are all the more regrettable in a translation that is clearly the fruit of much careful labour and in circumstances in which we may well have to wait a long time for a definitive and complete translation. The Dooyeweerd Publication Society, a North American organisation, has indicated that it intends to produce an English translation of the complete works of Dooyeweerd. It is hoped that these translations, when they appear, will provide a full scholarly apparatus as will befit their high significance. In the meantime, notwithstanding the above observations, *Roots* represents an outstanding achievement, and it is warmly commended to all readers of this newsletter.

Keith C Sewell, 1980.