

The Challenge of Marxist and Neo-Marxist Ideologies for Christian Scholarship

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The chapters in this book consist of papers delivered in their initial form during the Third International Conference of Institutions for Christian Higher Education (ICICHE), in 1981, at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa. This conference of reformational scholars of diverse backgrounds provided a unique occasion to share ideas and benefits of scholarly endeavour.

The theme of the first part of the conference was facing Marxism primarily as an ideology. The focus was on the emergence of various forms of neo-Marxism, Marxist scholarship and the challenge for Christian scholarship. Marxism can be called a religion. Communism is one of Christianity's greatest spiritual competitors. "Marxism has sometimes been called a Christian heresy," says Dr. K. Bockmuehl, of Regent College, Vancouver. "It can perhaps be compared to a distorted mirror image, where at least some of the parts and proportions of the - perhaps one should say decapitated - original can be recognized." Marxism as an ideology is militantly anti-Christian. For most Marxists, the Christian faith must be rejected because it comes down on the side of human confinement and even oppression. Biblical revelation opposes the whole framework of Marxist thought and praxis. Yet the conferees make a strong plea for a Christian-Marxist dialogue. "We must be ready to listen and learn from other traditions. Christian and otherwise, and confident in our faith, be committed to enter into critical dialogue with all our fellow scholars, including Marxists." I still question the feasibility of such a dialogue. A whole position paper could be devoted to this subject.

Throughout the papers, appeals are made to stand here and now in the freedom of Christ and to act without reserve for justice to be done to all our neighbors. Unlike the Marxists, Christians believe that the fulfillment of human history and all of social justice will come not through proletarian revolution, but through Christ's coming. In this light, I certainly appreciate the conference's concluding statement, "We pray that our Lord will return quickly to end injustice and oppression decisively, and that when He comes He will find us faithfully fulfilling our calling. Until He returns, we rededicate our energies and our personal and institutional resources to the establishment of justice, the work of mercy, and the proclamation that Christ is the Lord of lords and the King of kings."

Because the conference had so many scholars of different backgrounds, and even different understanding of reformational scholarship, the papers are uneven in approach and quality.

Dr. H. Hart of Toronto's Institute for Christian Studies is rather controversial in his short paper *The Marxist Challenge to Christians in Education*. He contends that "It is clear that we North Americans, by our lifestyles, by the educational systems we have, and by the governments for which we vote, systematically destroy the cultures on whose backs we live in riches," Is this really so? Why make such a sweeping generalization at a conference

of scholars? Poverty is not only an economic or political problem; it is complex and religious. Hart also asserts, "We teach the Christian life as doctrine and we train pastors by making them amateur theologians. But in the Bible, preaching and teaching are almost never analysis or explanation. Rather, they are instruction in action, showing a new way (life of compassion), blocking a false way (e.g., the American way)." Does Hart mean that we are to train activists? Should doctrinal preaching and teaching not lead to Christian devotion and practice? Of education in Western countries, Hart generalizes that almost all schooling "is training in citizenship, i.e., conditioning in participating in our modern capitalist, militarist, fascist states." He also emotionally raises the question, "Why does a whole nation support the fascist response of Reagan to oppression in El Salvador?" What does Hart mean by fascism? He does not bother to provide a definition.

Essays such as Sander Griffioen's *The Challenge of Marxist and NeoMarxist Ideologies for Christian Scholarship*, L.M. du Plessis' *Function and Role of the State* (with special reference to its relation to the church and educational institutions), Jonathan. Chao's *Function and Role of the State: The Place of Religion and Education (A Case Study of China)* and Klaus Bockmuehl's *Marxism and Education: A Survey Report* are outstanding, well-researched and documented contributions. These alone make the book worthwhile for any serious student of Marxism and its relationship to the Christian faith. The reformational insights are notable. They demonstrate that Calvinism can give a truly scholarly: and holistic reply to the challenge of Marxism. I commend Dr. John Vander Stelt for all the work done to make the conference a reality, and sharing its results.