

HANS ROOKMAAKER - a biography

Linette Martin

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Formerly most of the publications in english which pertain to "*reformational philosophy*" have issued from North America and there seems to be no let up from that quarter. Yet, in terms of the formative influence upon thinking christians in this part of the world, and especially for those who by psychic disposition are more British than American, there is beginning to be significant developments.

Linette Martin's Hans Rookmaaker may well herald the broadening and deepening of the decade-long influence which Francis Schaeffer's cultural apologetics have had upon evangelical students at the secularist universities in New Zealand and Australia.

In the relaxed armchair posture, stimulated by her novel format, Linette Martin leads the reader into a leisurely, gripping and serious examination of the life and work of Henderik Roelof Rookmaaker. Those interested in critically understanding the roots of 20th century christian thought, which has issued from the Netherlands, will also find many things to ponder from this book.

Rookmaaker, the christian art historian, clearly identified himself as a calvinist, yet in his upbringing he was isolated from the neo-calvinistic movement and it was only upon reading the Bible in a Nazi-prison that he was converted to christianity. The book however, is not of the genre "*intellectual biography*". Though the publishers are to be commended for commissioning such a work, they only gave their talented writer a mere twelve months to do the necessary research. Linette Martin shows that HRR is a very important figure within the renewal of christianity in the english speaking world in this century.

This book gives a framework of HRR's life-work. The story of his life is constructed as a series of biographical fragments: in Indonesia as the son of a Dutch official in the twilight of the Dutch East-India empire; his early teens and his Jewish girl-friend who was lost in the Nazi "*final solution*"; his conversion in the converted "*Oranje Hotel*" Nazi prison; his deportation to P.O.W camps and his introduction there to neo-calvinistic philosophy under the teaching of Captain Mekkes; and his life in the post-war reconstruction as Professor, husband, father, L'Abri worker, Anglophile and travelling art critic.

Whilst many of his country-men and women were being carried off as booty, doing things in the "*American Way*", Rookmaaker immersed himself in the rich traditions of pre-Enlightenment Dutch art (van Goyen) and the deeply-moving tempos in American negro "*soul*" music. He saw himself to be called to be a christian art historian and from these two sources found much needed inspiration to give his newly-found christian faith a critical distance from prevailing countertrends of christian accomodation or protestantic iconoclasm.

A biography which discusses HRR's scholarly approach, and his view of the relation of christianity to his research is yet to be written. This book throws up some crucial problems that require further rigorous investigation.

Rookmaaker's view of Calvinism is only given in bare outline. Though a faithful churchgoer and elder, he had a distinctive style in his church going which enabled him to keep his church's way of doi-g things at a distance. The English reader will not know much about his denomination - the Article 31 church - and even less about the "*verijegemaakt*". We read very briefly of his association with Rev. F. Schaeffer and of his love for England and of his sacrificial serving of a stimulating circle of British christians.

These are some of the critically important issues touched upon by Linette Martin. She does us a service in refraining from any slick journalistic flourish which would superficially resolve them. Perhaps it is her own style as an accomplished ballet dancer that enabled her to touch lightly, and artistically, upon the whole landscape of Rookmaaker's life. The question that I find intriguing is this : did he, as a christian art historian consider himself to be in Kuyper's line? Calvinist? Yes! But Kuyperian? Here is a crucial point for further investigation.

This book is the writer's delighting and insightful response to the christian challenge of Hans Rookmaaker. Many young christians in our quarter of the globe have experienced deep psychic alienation from the christianity of their parents. Sometimes the chasm appears even deeper for those who have had some contact with "*reformational philosophy*". They will be able to identify with Rookmaaker's struggle to assert a fresh christian perspective in the second-half of the twentieth century. But not only those. The book shows that Rookmaaker's appeal has extended to a wide variety of persons who have had to come to terms with the profound spiritual turmoil of post-war reconstruction and the empty solutions of liberal secular humanism.

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