

# Book Review: Marx and the Bible

Bron Taylor

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## Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression.

By Jose Porfirio Miranda. Mary knoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1974. Pp. xxi, 338. \$8.95; paperback \$4.95.

Jose Porfirio Miranda, professor of mathematics, economics and law at the Universidad Metropolitana Tztapalapa in Mexico City, states that his goal in *Marx and the Bible* is simply to understand the Bible. His interpretations, if accepted, would cause drastic changes in missiological priorities.

Miranda's main thesis is that God's purpose is to establish justice on behalf of the oppressed. God's people are called to overcome, by their action, their praxis, the political, social, and economic injustice rooted in the structures of society.

While presenting his convincing biblical case, Miranda criticizes those biblical case demonstrating God's priority of establishing justice for the oppressed. Then Miranda ignores the prophets as he truncates the gospel of its relevance to the individual, going so far as to argue that the apostle Paul was not concerned about individual salvation (p. 179), and that "Yahweh's main intervention in our history has *only one purpose* ... to serve the cause of justice" (p. 79, emphasis added). Miranda further demonstrates his adeptness at selective proof-texting by asserting that the only sin is injustice.

Perhaps most alarming is Miranda's view about God and man. Both views are rooted in his ontological assumptions. He rightly criticizes the western, Greek tendency to become preoccupied with ontological questions, stating, "The moment we ontologize we obstruct the summons of the word" (p. 134). Miranda's lack of interest in careful ontological study allows him to make significant errors about God and man. He arrives at an unbiblical, optimistic view of man, a naive anarchistic hope, and a correspondingly low view of God. He implies that sin and evil, begun by man, can be eliminated by the work of man (p. 255). Indeed it is tacitly implied that God is limited to establishing justice through the work of men. If this is so, then ethics can be reduced to an ethic of "the end justifies the means." While Miranda clearly demonstrates that believers are called to obedient praxis, this reviewer is extremely uneasy with Miranda's failure to define what is involved in praxis. Miranda's almost deistically transcendent God puts the total responsibility and hope for justice in fallen man. This low view of God's actual presence in the world can quickly lead to the acceptance of violence as a part of praxis.

*Marx and the Bible* levels significant criticisms and, read critically, can be a valuable resource. Miranda's reductionism, oversimplifications, and denial of certain biblical themes does not negate the accuracy of his assertions. It will, however, make it easier for western Christians to dismiss this book as "ideological"; and herein lies the tragedy, because what he is saying needs so desperately to be heard.

—Bron Taylor

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