
Pro Rege

Volume 6 | Number 3

Article 10

March 1978

Dr. Barker on Art

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Recommended Citation

Bos, Abraham (1978) "Dr. Barker on Art," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 6: No. 3, 33 - 35.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol6/iss3/10

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Incidentally....

by James Koldenhoven

Dr. Barker on Art

Nicholas P. Barker, academic dean of Covenant College, presented a series of lectures entitled "A Christian Position on Aesthetics and the Fine Arts" to the Dordt College faculty on January 12 and 13. This was the premiere presentation of these lectures, which will be given at seven other Christian colleges. For the past four years this consortium of colleges has selected a topic and a lecturer to make presentations in a lecture series to its faculties.

There are compelling reasons for the faculty members of all disciplines not only to be acquainted with and to be challenged by what is going on in other disciplines, but also to be able to see the integrality of the curriculum and to appreciate how disciplines fit together. Dr.

Barker's lectures will provide copious material for reflection, consideration, and discussion for students, faculties, and the entire Christian community.

Dr. Barker's scholarly lectures made a valuable contribution to the understanding, appreciation, and evaluation of the aesthetic and the arts. Each lecture was informative, interesting, and challenging. Moreover, the three lectures were coherently related, so as to provide a unified statement about the arts for individuals and institutions in the Christian community. Even if one does not follow or support the entire argument, the lectures contain many worthwhile statements that deserve a hearing. He said, for example: "One of the great shames of the evangelical world is, I believe, our frequently present-

ing to God in worship services, in concerts, in architecture, in poetry, and in painting such tawdry and sometimes even tacky things, perhaps believing that we are justified in so doing by our having observed careful economics or our having had good intentions and having done our best."

Each of the three lectures can be divided into two main sections. In the first half of the first lecture, "The Aesthetic Dimension of Creation" (an appropriate starting point), Dr. Barker gave his foundations for the aesthetic dimension. The aesthetic, he said, which we observe and talk about is not optional, accidental, or even a matter of human discovery; rather, it is embedded in human experience and it belongs to the creation, and as such, comes from the hand of the Creator. The interesting theory which Dr. Barker presented is that the aesthetic dimension does not reside in created objects, nor in one of the functions of man, but rather in a synergism—that which lies between but which is part of both.

He put it as follows: "The aesthetic dimension of creation [is located] in a synergism of an object's sensuous aspect, either directly present or imagined, with our own apprehensive capacities, primarily our sensory and emotional faculties." This is the heart of Dr. Barker's theory, around which he weaves an interesting collocation of data, quotations, and ideas. The second half of the first lecture explored the value of what the aesthetic dimension is and does. The entire creation, and therefore the aesthetic dimension as well, is important to God, and, consequently, should be important to and have value for men. What the aesthetic dimension does, is to give pleasure; it is the pleasure-giving dimension of creation.

The second lecture, "Human Art Works," presented the necessity for and the character of human art works. The creation of human art works is part of the responsible task given to man, sometimes even directly commanded by God for the delight of Himself and men. Dr.

Barker stated: "I should like to propose that if the grateful apprehension of the aesthetic dimension of creation is one of the happy responsibilities of God's people, extending the possibilities of the aesthetic dimension is another." And, "One important characteristic of works of art is their manifestation of what man can do with physical materials created directly by God. That is, works of art are manifestations of man's discovery over time of the potentialities and the limitations of such God-created things as wood, stone, color, line, and musical tone, as well as of such man-made things as graving tools, paints, musical instruments, conventional forms, and stylistic traditions." Also, "A work of art is anything man-made that, regardless of its producer's intentions, deserves attention directed to it primarily in its aesthetic dimension, for it is an instance of the creative unfolding of the aesthetic dimension of creation."

The last half of the second lecture delineated the primary features of art works, which are, according to Dr. Barker, representation, expression, the intrinsic, and the effective. It is his theory that art works contain more or less of each of these features, and he maintained that the intrinsic is the most uniquely artistic. Representation refers to what the artist wants to capture and depict; expression refers to what the artist feels or the emotion he wants to convey; the intrinsic refers to the forms that the artist employs; and the effective refers to how the artist intends his art to change the way his audience thinks, feels, or acts.

The first lecture presented the character of the aesthetic and its value; the second, the necessity of human art works and their features; and the third, the evaluation of art works and the concept of "Beauty," which was also the title of the third lecture. Criticism is the discipline of analysis and evaluation, Dr. Barker said, and beauty is the primary criterion of aesthetic value. An interesting point made by Dr. Barker is that our appreciation of art works and

our aesthetic responses need not be equivalent to our judgments of aesthetic value. This leaves room for both the cultivation of taste and appreciation as well as for the development of criteria to analyze and evaluate art works.

Although Dr. Barker wanted to give the major task of criticism to the expert and specialist, he also affirmed that everyone can and must make judgments concerning the arts. Critical evaluations must be given honestly, clearly, helpfully, and with appropriate tone. They must be made with humility, with high standards, with criteria appropriate to the different features of art works, and with an awareness of the historic relativity of different styles. His position was carefully qualified: he advocated striving for artistic excellence without absolutizing it.

Each of the major features of art

works, namely, representation, expression, the intrinsic and the effective, can be the object of the critic's attention, said Dr. Barker. "Responsible criticism applies to a particular work, criteria appropriate to the feature or features characteristic of that work." Previously we noted that it is the intrinsic that Dr. Barker regards as the feature most identifiable with the aesthetic, and in this lecture we learned that it is beauty which he regards as the "... term comprising all the criteria appropriate to the intrinsic feature of art works."

Each of his lectures was followed by critique and discussion by the Dordt faculty. His work deserves the attention of the larger Christian community which struggles with the issues related to art and the aesthetic aspect of human experience.

by Abe Bos

Renewal Lectures

"Renewal Reverberations" was the theme chosen by Dr. Sidney De Waal for the Dordt College Reformation Day lecture series. Dr. De Waal is pastor of the Third Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, and an official in the development of The King's College. Speaking to a capacity audience at the Bethel Christian Reformed Church of Sioux Center on Sunday afternoon, De Waal laid the foundation for his subsequent public addresses.

Warning his listeners not to accept reductionistic views of the Christian task and witness, Dr. De Waal pointed them to the full Biblical demands of the Christian faith. We must, he said, take seriously renewal in Jesus Christ.

In three lectures, De Waal focused on the meaning of renewal in the family, in education, and in the church. He began his first lecture by stressing the many difficulties facing the family today. Chris-