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Theatrical Realism Raked

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Theatrical Realism Raked

The first of what we hope will be many conferences on the subject of the Christian and theatre was held at Dordt last spring. Colleges, schools, and theatre groups got together under this title, New World Theatre Consortium, Conference I (1975).

There were seven colleges represented, as well as a number of high schools and theatre groups. The Consortium is set up around Theatre (or Drama) Departments of Christian Colleges. These in turn are permitted to invite Christians who either teach or perform professionally in the theatre, and who share the basic commitment of the Consortium.

The opening address to the Consortium was presented by the writer of this report. The address is appearing in consecutive issues of Pro Rege, June and September.

The main speaker at the Conference was Dr. J. D. Hurrell, a member of the Theatre Department at the University of Minnesota. Hurrell's primary interest is in the aesthetics of theatre, and the history of ideas that surrounds theatre.

Hurrell pursued the question of "realism" which had been introduced in the opening lecture. "We are here," he said, "to talk about realism because that is what people talk about." His opening remarks were intended to show that "realism" is not a recent development in theatre, but that the term is. Hurrell traced historically the notion that it is man's job, as in Milton's "Paradise Lost," to "justify the ways of God to man."

"The nineteenth century," said Hur-

rell, "was innovative only in that it assumed an objective materialism" for it has long been assumed that the artist's task is to show (justify) that the world is real. From this assumption, the speaker noted, comes the idea of imitation; and if art is imitative, it must be imitating something—or so the assumption continues. First, one asks, What is its subject? Then one says, Good art is a good imitation of its subject.

Hurrell made three rejoinders to these problems. First, he said that the word "realism" is grossly oversimplified in being restricted to the material world. There is more to life than that which can be observed or handled. Second, drama imitates by doing and not by being. It is a dynamic art. It imitates an action by being itself an action and must, therefore, be judged for its own action, not the action it "imitates." Third, as a dynamic art, drama does not answer questions so much as ask them. Theatre is not a metaphor of life as much as life is a metaphor of theatre.

Hurrell's second lecture dealt with examples of plays throughout history. Among the examples were Sophocles' Antigone, Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, and several of Harold Pinter's plays. The speaker contrasted and compared the visions of these playwrights.

Changing views about man and the universe have sharply influenced the structure and meaning of contemporary theatre. Hurrell made this the major point of his second address, particularly in dealing with the modern playwright, Harold Pinter. The speaker pointed out the influence of Ein-

steinian physics on anthropology today. Pinter's plays, he noted, are all set in one room, isolated from everything else, and silence is a recurring feature of the dialogue.

Dr. Hurrell spoke warmly about his visit to Dordt College and the Consortium. He was particularly impressed with the ideological conviction of the conferees, and

their genuine desire to know more about theatre.

All meetings were taped, and the tapes may be purchased at cost from the Dordt College Media Center.

The New World Theatre Consortium, Conference II (1976), will be held, once again at Dordt College, on April 8, 9, and 10.

Cheers for Speirs

Dr. Randall Speirs lectured to Dordt students and faculty on April 16 and 17. Presently he is a Wycliffe Bible Translator to the Tewa Indians in Espanola, New Mexico. Often he spends his summers as a guest lecturer in linguistics at the University of North Dakota. It was here that Cornelis Boot, from the Dordt Language Department came to know and appreciate him as a teacher and friend. He came to the Dordt campus by invitation of the Language Department, and the Dordt community enjoyed its opportunity to hear this dedicated Christian scholar.

Not only did Dr. Speirs lecture to numerous language classes, he also led chapel, addressed the faculty, held "monolingual" demonstrations, and participated in the first Dordt high school "Language Day" program. His chapel talk was inspiring, and his lectures ("Making sense out of sound," "Linguistics and Learning," and "Translation problems—we've got 'em!") were stimulating. However, the most interesting presentations were the two "monolingual" demonstrations entitled: "If you are going to translate the Bible into Buga-Buga, where in the world do you start?" For these demonstrations we invited an "informant" speaker of a language unknown to, or studied by Speirs. The informant was instructed not to reveal the name of the language he was speaking, to speak only the unknown language in response to questions or gestures by Speirs, and not to look at the blackboard on which Speirs was

trying to record all of the useful language data the informant supplied. Dr. Speirs spoke only in Tewa. After a half hour of gathering data, he attempted to guess the language, to give the meaning to words and sentences, and to begin an analysis of the sound structure, the morphology and the syntax of the language. The one informant, Dr. Thumasathit, spoke the Asian Thai language and the other, Rev. Harold De Groot, the African Tiv language. Dr. Speirs showed the method and problems of linguist-translators to the approval of large audiences. He demonstrated two things about the science of linguistics: that linguistics is interesting, fascinating in fact; and that it is an extremely useful and practical science.

The lecture, "Translation problems—we've got 'em!," which proved to be most interesting to me, was presented to the Greek and Hebrew students. In this lecture Speirs pointed out the problems which confront Bible translators, and the interrelationships of theological presuppositions in translating. He recommends to every reader of the Bible, Translating the Word of God, by John Beekman and John Callow (Zondervan).

The Language Department, plus many students and faculty were pleased to have heard Dr. Speirs, the linguist, the theologian, the translator, the anthropologist, the warm, folksy scholar.

by Abram Bos