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Undoing the Evil Made of Good

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Undoing the Evil Made of Good

If we can agree that this little space, called "Incidentally," is, as it seems to be, a potpourri of news and views, then you will allow a few remarks collected around the title above. We know that God turns evil to good. But we ourselves often allow good to be turned to evil.

Example one. This past Fall, as a group of Christian students on campus worked towards the production of "The Hangman Cried," an improvisation on the Book of Esther, they all but failed to come up with a good ending. As you know, the Book of Esther ends with the Jews giving gifts and proclaiming an annual holiday to celebrate God's victory over their enemies. The Dordt production was to be given just before Christmas, and the first impulse was, "Wow, man, beautiful, an ending that is right in season!" The idea was to create a finale of song accompanied by the exchange of colorfully wrapped gifts. The instant response was scrapped, however, when someone pointed out how gift-giving has become so predisposed by materialism. It would be misunderstood, and certainly was not the meaning of gift-giving in Esther's time. The embrace, too, along with the kiss of friendship, were suggested and withdrawn from the options when the group came to sense how these symbols, good in themselves, had been reduced to either sexually-oriented or "arty"-oriented tokens. The group decided finally to conclude the production with a song of celebration.

Example two. Educational institutions, certainly those of Reformed Christian background, but also many evangelical schools, continue to have a problem with the dance. Most any campus, and even high

schools, will have a mix of students which displays a variety of responses to the question of dance. Some come from families which have little antipathy towards either the word "dance" or the activity, while others are opposed to even discussing the meaning of "dance." Some students are quite disinterested in the subject and activity, while others have had some training and experience, either in social dancing or in creative dance. In any case, it is apparent that somebody at some time in the history of a school will want to raise the question, "If it was right for David to dance before the Lord, why should we not also be able to praise God in the dance?" Once again, and this is the point of these paragraphs, society has turned something good into something evil. The dance has come to be associated with sensuality. And it is now up to the Christian community to undo the evil made of good.

Example three. This has to do with the word and meaning of "theatre." For some time it was possible to avoid the use of the word when referring to stage productions, by using the word "drama." When the Christian Reformed Church rescinded its synodical stand of 1928 against movies (also called "the theatre"), it referred to the subject as "film arts." By this phrase, the synod correctly noted that there is an artistic potential in the film. This is how distinctions are made, as proper names are applied to human activities. Even before 1928, the film industry came into its own, it assumed the name theatre, at least as the place where the films were shown. "Theatre" then became associated with showing and seeing moving pictures. To recover its

identity, the live stage productions were called "dramas." But that did not satisfy those who wanted to distinguish between the various literary forms: poetry, fiction, and drama. Drama, they maintained, was the literary aspect of theatre. So, throughout the educational world, and that rather recently, drama departments changed their titles to theatre departments, to distinguish themselves from the literature departments. And they could do that because films were no longer being associated with buildings which were at one time performing (theatre) centers. The distinctions now are clearer, but still have some unfortunate connotations for some people. For some the theatre is still a place where dirty pictures are displayed on a screen by men under the influence of the devil. The Christian community, again, has a responsibility, to

undo the evil made of good, and a good way to begin is by making the following distinctions: (1) drama is both the human quality and the scripted aspect of theatre, which may provide a limited, non-enacted experience without the use of a theatre; (2) the film is not theatre, though the film may be shown in a theatre; and, (3) theatre is the live performance of a dramatically-qualified activity, which depends on the effects and techniques that a theatre can provide.

Undoing the evil made of good can not be accomplished overnight. Nor can it be done simply by renaming, though giving proper and appropriate names to things is very important in the process of proclaiming the Lord's world. The embrace, the kiss, gift-giving, the dance, and theatre—shall we only rename them, or also reclaim them?

Spring Theatre Conference

The New World Theatre Conference is the title given to a series of two meetings, the first scheduled for April, 1975. Dordt College will be the host for this conference, as well as the one planned for a year later. While Dordt will provide the format and program for these two conferences, the structure of The New World Theatre Conference will allow it to become an independent professional organization.

To get the Conference started, Dordt has invited representatives from sister colleges, including Calvin College, Trinity Christian College, Northwestern College (Orange City), Covenant College, Bethel Christian College (Minneapolis), Wheaton College, and Gordon College. Others, such as directors and teachers of theatre in high schools and professional persons from Christian theatres are also invited, though their invitations are handled differently, that is, through one of the invited colleges. Organizers of the Conference are asking college representatives to extend invitations to

those known to be interested in Christian theatre and its related problems.

Dr. John D. Hurrell, lecturer in dramatic theory at the University of Minnesota, will be the resource person. Hurrell's main presentation will deal with the rise of realism and the subsequent reaction to realism in world theatre. The opening address will be given by James Koldenhoven, director of theatre at Dordt College. A third person in the program, whose commitment is still somewhat uncertain because of pending contracts, is Mr. James Lawless, a professional actor. The conference is scheduled to coincide with a performance of Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" by the Dordt College Thaliens.

The purposes of The New World Theatre Conference are several. First, it will bring together those who are attempting to redirect theatre away from the grip of secularism. This difficult task requires that efforts are conjoined. Second, the conference recognizes that there is a growing number of persons (students, in particular)