BOEKBESPREKINGEN

60, 61, 73. Een niet-transcendentale, maar in een transcendentale houding besloten critiek leidt hem op een dwaalspoor, zowel wanneer hij Aristoteles’ opvatting afwijst, als wanneer hij Aeschylus, Euripides, Anaxagoras, Socrates en Plato prijst door hun opvattingen toe te dichten die ze niet gehad hebben. Ruhi Afnan slaagt er niet in zijn zoroastrisch-theologische bril af te zetten en met eigen ogen te kijken. Daarom kunnen we zijn studie niet anders dan oncritisch noemen. Dat is erg spijtig, vooral als we er op letten, hoeveel moeite de schrijver zich getroost heeft, om zijn oncritische zoroastrische boodschap onder woorden te brengen bij zijn beoordeling van dichters en denkers uit de periode van Pericles. Zijn illustraties zijn steeds boeiend; maar zijn bewijsvoering schiet ernstig te kort. Hoogst leerzaam is deze studie, omdat ze zo duidelijk doet zien, hoe misplaatst en misleidend een transcendentale theologische critiek blijkt te zijn. Op dit punt hebben we in ons vaderland een rijke ervaring.

K.J.P.

H. R. Rookmaaker, Modern art and the death of a culture, (Inter-Varsity Press £1.25 hb, 75 p pb)

The I.V.P. have excelled in producing a book of neat format with many good black and white illustrations and most attractive typography and layout.

In particular, the editing has not neutralised the original and very personal timbre of Rookmaaker’s style, which moves with both care and urgency to put over its strategic points, whilst still managing to make it an “English” book for an English speaking readership.

This book is the fruit of labours begun by the author over 25 years ago, at which time he was getting to grips with the implications of the Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee for cultural history and aesthetics. In fact his articles of the late 40s and early 50s (some of them published in Philosophia Reformata) reveal that it was the nature and movement of cultural history, and its relation to the whole life of man, that claimed priority in his thinking rather than the development of an aesthetic theory. For this reason, his work stands in some contrast to that of Calvin Seerveld, the other major contributor to the W.d.W. discussion on art and aesthetics. Seerveld’s A Christian Critique of Art attacks the problem of a Christian aesthetic theory far more frontally than Rookmaaker, whose publications throughout the growth of his vision have tended to encircle and close in on the problems of art and artists with ever-increasing sensitivity and concern. The background to this present book must be seen, not only in Synthetist Art Theories (1959), Jazz Blues and Spirituals (1960), Kunst en Amusement (1962), and Art and the Public Today (1968), but also in his experience as art critic for Trouw during the crucial 1950s, the time of many important exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, and his friendship with Francis Schaeffer and through it the confrontations in L’Abri Fellowship with the curse of modern thought and art on the lives of many young people today. Not least, we must bear in mind Rookmaaker’s development as an art historian — he is now Professor of the History of Art at the Free University in Amsterdam — which reflects much of the search for cultural context and meaning found in Panofsky’s writings, and more than a little of the infectious connoisseurship of his own teacher, Van Regteren Altena.
The fruit of many years' labour: and more specifically this book is the blending of two of the most basic and influential lectures developed by the author in recent years: *Three Steps to Modern Art* and *Beat music and Protest*. As the author repeatedly states, this is no history of art. Nor is it a systematic discussion of aesthetics. Above all, it is not a book for quick reference or dipping into: to go index-hunting with a view to settling a five minute dispute over "what does Rookmaaker think about Picasso?" or "is Pop Art basically unchristian?" is to miss the depth and subtlety which the author has put into his deceptively fluent argument. In the many lecture and seminar confrontations Rookmaaker has faced over the last decade or more, a number of which I have witnessed, many a questioner has been won over at the point where he caught a glimpse of the real dimensions of Rookmaaker's vision: that the answer to a question can rarely be a yes or no turning only on the one issue under focus, but demands that roots are constantly exposed which shoot right down into the depth and fullness of human life in a created world.

It is surely its refusal to offer palliatives to the symptoms of cultural sickness that has won the book an amazing penetration into English cultural discussion, since its publication at the end of 1970. Rows of the familiar cover are to be seen in leading art and university bookshops, and at Christmas time the readers of The Observer were introduced to it as a “Book of the Year” by the critic Malcolm Muggeridge. Even the London centres of counter-culture in the Charing Cross Road have to make room on their shelves for a Christian book on art. The wholeness and integration of the views presented by Rookmaaker are obviously reaching through to an English audience — and by no means only a Christian audience — even through their implicit W.d.W. thrust is uncompromised. In his analysis of a sick culture, with its need for health and normality, Rookmaaker insistently points the modern man to God's foundation of a world whose structures and potential are lovingly balanced for man's growth and enjoyment. This is the theme of the whole book, yet it is not written in the specialised language of the W.d.W., nor in the "holy" language of so many retreating evangelicals. The intention is to communicate; to talk about the things that are wrong with our culture, and to point the way to health. So the apostasy of the Renaissance-Enlightenment axis is no mere catalogue of old pictures and attitudes,

"The nineteenth century — and ours too — has laboured to work the new principles out. The result has been a demasqué in which many things held sacred or deep are brought down to what they really are: sex, lust, power, the survival of the fittest, an instinct or will to live. Life itself, instead of the varied and deep meaning it had in biblical language — man's full being, his true humanity, his work, dreams and aims, so that Christ himself was able to say that He is the Life — life became nothing more than biological life, the beating heart and sexual urges and quest for food and drinks. We can understand the man who, standing at the end of this development, asked recently in one of the underground papers "Is there a life before death?""  

(p 47)