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Performer as Prophet and Priest (Book Review)

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science, with its complexity and sophistication, is quite some distance removed from the shapes and sounds of everyday experience. As a result, the truthfulness of science is also remote from the truthfulness of everyday experience" (92). Yet, he is not so much opposed to science as he is critical of our almost uncritical acceptance of scientific discourse as the ultimate word and our failure to see it as one discourse among many.

Although one gets the impression at the beginning of the book that it is addressed to Christian school teachers at all levels, the thrust of the book seems aimed more at

Performer as Prophet and Priest, Judith Rock and Norman Mealy (New York: Harper and Row, 1988). 156 pp. \$13.95. Reviewed by Verne Meyer, Professor of Theatre Arts.

In *Performer As Prophet and Priest*, dancer/choreographer, Judith Rock, and musicologist/liturgist, Norman Mealy, describe how their arts should function within the liturgy of a worship service. In the introduction, "Lighting the Shadow Side," Rock asserts that "the import of the women's movement on the church has set the stage for a new meeting of the church and the arts" (xi). Women and the arts, she says, "have historically been forced to occupy the shadow side of the sphere of human experience and understanding: less valued, less well 'understood'" (xi). Only in recent years has intuitive knowing (associated with the arts and the "feminine" in males and females) been given the validity it deserves in relation to rational knowing (associated with masculinity and cause-and-effect reasoning). The women's movement, observes Mealy, has demonstrated the need for reintegrating our rational and intuitive capacities not only in life outside the church, but also in the liturgy of worship.

As we turn toward and learn from our collective feminine shadow side, we have an unprecedented opportunity to reclaim the arts as inexhaustible wells of intuition and image, because the arts, in their form and function, depend on and elicit intuitive response. (xii)

The authors' purpose for writing, contends Mealy, is to demonstrate how music and dance uniquely elicit the intuitive in worship so that the worship might be complete.

Early in the text the authors argue that worship consists of "theological" statements rooted in individual participants' "spirituality." Spirituality "has to do with practices which help us make a space in our being and life in and through which our response to God is deepened." Theology, on the other hand, "has to do with formally crafted communications to other people about what God might be like, on the basis of what goes on in that space" (xiv). The act of worship, then, entails "doing theology." That is, leaders of worship use what they know about their individual "space" or "spirituality" to do theology within

Christian high school and Christian college teachers than at Christian elementary teachers. The book is thought-provoking and should be read by Christian college instructors in all disciplines. It forces one to think hard about what it means to give a Christian perspective on the subject matter we teach.

The book suffers from excessive rhetorical questions and parenthetical statements. This seems to be a set of lectures which need to be woven more tightly. A clearer focus would have helped tie the author's insights into a more coherent argument to give greater guidance to Christian teachers.

the service: "to present formally crafted communications to other people about what God might be like."

The intuitive, feminine knowing associated with dance and music complements and completes the analytical, masculine knowing that constitutes the didactic discourse of nearly all spoken elements in liturgy. Liturgical language, other than poetry, contend the authors, communicates theological truth in a linear manner (moving from the known to the known in a rational argument); on the other hand, music and dance communicate theological truth in a manner unique to the two arts (leaping from the known to the unknown).

The arts direct us from system and answer toward a relational theological process. The only way to know an art work is to wait: to wait with, wait for, wait on the intuitive truth it has to tell. This process of waiting, watching, listening creates in one who waits in empty space into which some new perception of the truth can come. (44)

In chapter three Rock and Mealy describe the creative processes used by the choreographer and composer, and in chapter four they explain how those processes are the artists' efforts to fulfill the performer/believer's responsibilities as priest and prophet. The performer as priest "consolidates, guards, and sanctions, reminding the community of its history, traditions, and achievements"; whereas the performer as prophet "judges and challenges, reminding the same community of its failures and calling for a more righteous future" (81).

Finally, in the fifth chapter, "Art as Pentecost," Rock and Mealy suggest that dance and music are pentecostal paradigms in the sense that Pentecost represents "new life in the Spirit creating new relationships" (119). Liturgical music and dance, say the authors, enable worshippers to make new associations and fresh insights regarding the nature of God and the nature of Christian living.

Unlike classical systematic theology, music and

dance do not attempt to convince us of the truth of a complete and rational system of belief. They do not attempt to explain the universe or our presence in it. Instead, they invite us to come deeper into the landscape of dream, surprise, and longing. (124)

Performer as Priest and Prophet is valuable reading for anyone interested in the nature and function of liturgy. The thesis of the work is clear; and given the authors' definitions of shadow side, spirituality, theology, and dance, their arguments are well developed. Particularly significant—and refreshing—are the following challenges addressed not only to liturgists, but to all worshippers: (1) Be wary of sexist language and practice in liturgy which lock as many believers out of the worship experience as they invite in. (2) Consider how dance and music can further enhance your worship services; the two arts, rooted in the nature of our humanness, represent resources for worship which are as fully redeemed as the mental and analytical. (3) Control the colors, designs, and forms within the worship space so that the inevitable, intuitive influence these have on the practice of worship is positive. (4) Use art to enhance a spirit of playfulness and joy in worship; both are fitting characteristics of worship for those who have confidence in the cosmic, transformational impact of the redemption. (5) Remember that liturgical music and dance are the efforts of humans who will, at times, fail. Liturgical art will be no more consistently successful in enhancing worship than the sermon. When either the sermon or the art fails, only *constructive* criticism is helpful.

However, the use of Rock and Mealy's text as a practical guide for shaping liturgy in a Reformed Christian congregation is distinctly limited by the authors' understanding of the nature of spirituality and theology. Spirituality, they suggest (a better term is faith-life), results from a person's autonomous choice to believe; the human creature determines whether he/she will have faith. Only the person who chooses to make a personal "space" has faith. Theology, they suggest, is conjecture based on what happens in the "space" of one's individual spirituality. Liturgical art, they imply, is a medium for communal theologizing. The best liturgical art is open-ended, risk-taking, theological conjecture which probes the ambiguous nature of God and the cosmos.

As Paul Tillich pointed out in his *Systematic Theology*, our quest for God is always am-

biguous, because it is carried out in finite moral and cultural terms. (42)

One of the most valuable things about the arts is that they unblushingly tell us so many diverse truths. . . . They remind us that if we are to first image and then create a more just future for the church and the world, flexibility will be a keystone of the whole structure. . . . Which means learning to live with and in ambiguity. (44)

A liturgist working out of Rock and Mealy's definitions would think of art as being public, theological statements based on private, intuitive assimilation. A worship service would be understood as a composite of both rational, analytic, non-artistic statements, as well as intuitive, emotive, artistic statements. The focus of the liturgist, then, is to develop liturgical action that elicits meaningful, communal, theological conjecture: worship.

A Reformed view of faith and theology is different (see Vander Stelt's article elsewhere in this issue). Faith in the *salvific* sense, is understood as a gift from God. God, the Creator, is in control—he initiates faith-life. Worship is a human response to God generated by God's gift of faith. Worship is a dialogue between God and his people. The focus of the liturgist is to shape the dialogue so that the worship is complete. Worship is communion, not conjecture. It is a unique expression of faith, not a theological statement. And it springs out of a Creator-initiated, covenantal relationship between God and his people, not a creature-initiated decision to make space for God.

As Calvin Seerveld has pointed out, the arts are, by their nature, allusive, non-literal, and non-analytic. Allusiveness distinguishes the arts. Within liturgy, allusive, artistic elements are important not because they help us probe the ambiguity of the nature of God and the cosmos, and not because they extend our reach beyond systematic theology. Using dance, music, poetry, and other arts in liturgy is fitting because art is a basic human potential which enables us to confess our sin more earnestly, to rejoice in God's goodness more fully, to praise his name more fluently, and to do other things fitting and proper in communal worship. The task of the liturgist is to shape these contributions so they serve the people's need to worship.