Quotes from “Learning to See Again: Liturgy as Light for Life”

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), the founder of the Chassidic movement, was once asked: "Why is it that Chassidim burst into song and dance at the slightest provocation? Is this the behavior of a healthy, sane individual?"

The Baal Shem Tov responded with a story:

Once, a musician came to town—a musician of great but unknown talent. He stood on a street corner and began to play.

Those who stopped to listen could not tear themselves away, and soon a large crowd stood enthralled by the glorious music whose equal they had never heard. Before long they were moving to its rhythm, and the entire street was transformed into a dancing mass of humanity.

A deaf man walking by wondered: Has the world gone mad? Why are the townspeople jumping up and down, waving their arms and turning in circles in middle of the street?

"Chassidim," concluded the Baal Shem Tov, "are moved by the melody that issues forth from every creature in G-d's creation. If this makes them appear mad to those with less sensitive ears, should they therefore cease to dance?


In God, Truth is one, but finite creatures know Truth as truths, and when scattered across the page the plurality of truths may seem to contradict each other. Antimony is precisely going past this experience of contradictoriness to arrive at unity.

Fagerberg and Hatfield, Liturgy Outside Liturgy: The Liturgical Theology of Fr. Alexander Schmemann, 15.

In particular liturgy performs a set of tactical operation on the human body as a means of transforming the senses and opening them to spiritual perception. Lysaught focuses on the way bodily training engenders a transformed vision of reality because she
argues, as with Murdoch and Hauerwas, that it is “by learning to see the world in a new way we are trained to act in a new way.”

M. Therese Lysaught has argued that liturgy is intended “to train us out of the habits of our dominant culture.” For Lysaught the liturgy calls Christians out of the world and invites them to participate in the body of Christ as “citizens of the kingdom of God.”

Liturgy is the practice by which God transforms the imagination and desire of individuals through the sense of sight (images and icons), touch (the sign of peace), sound (music), taste (bread and wine), and smell (incense).


Fagerberg describes Liturgy as a “perichoresis of the Trinity kenotically extended to draw us into a cooperative spiritual ascent whose goal is deification.”


The liturgist makes his journey with regularity, twice crossing a threshold once in each direction. First he crosses the narthex from the world into the nave, in order to absorb the energy of the altar in the sanctuary; he crosses the narthex from the nave back into the world, in order to release that light into the world. Phosphorescence, I read, is a process by which the energy absorbed by a substance is slowly released in the form of light. Exactly! We absorb the energy of Mt Tabor at every liturgy, we ingest the substance of Christ at the Eucharist, and by the light this releases in us we see the world liturgically. This explains the coexistence and interaction of sacred with profane. People ask why we need the sacred sacraments if the profane world is a sacrament. The answer is we come in for eye surgery. We cannot return to our place in the cosmic liturgy until our priesthood has been repaired. The ordained priesthood sacramentally equips the common priesthood for its mundane cosmic priesthood. The man in the sanctuary ministers to the men and women in the nave so they can resume beyond the narthex the liturgical career that Adam and Eve had forfeited.

Fagerberg, Consecrating the World: On Mundane Liturgical Theology, 91.
Works Cited / Selected Bibliography


