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*Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship.* By Bruce Ellis Benson. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013. Pp. 160. \$17.99.

Benson attempts to bring the often-secularized world of art and aesthetics into conversation with religion, particularly a faith community's acts of liturgical worship. The work is ecumenical, with particular attention to a Protestant approach that has often shunned a formal "ordo" of patterned ritual and texts. As such, B., in line with his Episcopal liturgical roots, opens the type of interdisciplinary conversation between art and its use within the liturgy that liturgical theologians have long advocated. In a series of five clearly written, but somewhat disparate, chapters, B. looks at (1) the dynamic of liturgy and all of life as "call and response"; (2) the philosophical discourse pitting "imitation" and "originality" in the creation of works of art; (3) his own conclusion about all creativity as an act much like jazz improvisation, that is, not *ex nihilo* but "*from something*" (72, emphasis original); (4) the artist's responsibility to the community that does not compromise one's integrity; and finally, (5) the improvisation we call "liturgy," that is, "festival time," honoring both scripted and spontaneous prayers of a community (152) that help shape "living pieces of art that glorify God" (146). Such a way of understanding liturgy welcomes artistic fashioning, which "can *itself* become a way of praising and praying" (133, emphasis original). B.'s ability to communicate the issues of a philosophical aesthetics in conversation with modern culture is worth noting, especially for those who have been largely shaped by the deconstruction of the whole in postmodern perspectives.

In the sphere of liturgy, however, B. seems to obfuscate the issue. Contemporary liturgical theologians have embraced a dynamism and rhythm to ritual activity when the church gathers to celebrate. An ecumenical array of figures such as David Power, Gordon Lathrop, Alexander Schmemmann, Geoffrey Wainwright, Louis-Marie Chauvet, and others affirm B.'s contention that liturgy in public worship and lived in the concrete world of our ethical and social lives participates in an ongoing improvisation that shares faith and practice with "a community of improvisers" (93) who have gone before us. Christ is "really present," and the Trinity's *perichōrēsis* is shared with creation. This communion in the Trinity and incarnated in Christ's presence, unfortunately, is barely a background motif of this volume.

In spite of that lacuna, B. insists that "intensive liturgy" (the ritual gathering itself) makes the rest of living liturgically ("extensive liturgy") possible (15, 156). Hence, readers would expect a book entitled *Liturgy as a Way of Life* to contain more than the final few pages to attempt to draw that central moment of liturgical embodiment into this important conversation. The book highlights for readers the aesthetic principles at work that encourage contemporary culture to engage in a mutual and reverent appreciation for both art and religious faith. B. wades into the artistic world with grace, employing the popular novel *My Name Is Asher Lev*, classical and contemporary

music that readers can appreciate, and the visual arts of painting and film media-making. He rightly and gently chides both the art world and religious institutions that have maintained a stubborn divide.

Finally, B. situates the conversation between the art world and religious institutions and their mutual concerns with concrete examples of a number of Christian congregations, particularly St. Gregory of Nyssa Church in San Francisco, as models of fruitful interchange that can take place and yield something new in the midst of an ancient rhythm.

For students who wrestle with postmodernism's cultural and ecclesiological discomfort, this volume is an accessible doorway into the iconic character of artistic fashioning and its use in church communities. The work encourages persons of faith to allow great art to give voice and shape to God's goodness, truth, and beauty to which the tradition holds fast and for which the community is a sacred vessel. Praise and thanksgiving, fashioned within an ancient ordo, is the central expression of this holy encounter. The liturgy has a rhythm and harmony to which B. does not refer. He might have chosen his primary metaphor, jazz, to show how it could illumine the liturgical dynamic.

This is the seventh book in a series dedicated to deepening the dialogue between "The Church and Postmodern Culture." Series editor James K. A. Smith set the tone in his foreword: artistic engagement, he contends, may be the antidote "for those of us who have seen postmodernism . . . help the church awake from its modern slumbers" (x). But the promise the liturgy holds for Christian identity and the world's healing and wholeness seems to ask more than Smith deems appropriate. In recommending B.'s work, Smith regrettably states, "So one could hope that a new appreciation for the arts of the church might be a kind of 'gateway drug' that draws congregations to liturgical renewal" (xi). One should hope that any renewal of the liturgy will be more of a shimmering icon into profound Mystery than a gateway into low stakes that merely encourage postmodern folks to try out "liturgy" as an answer to numbing emptiness. Both liturgy and good art offer much more than that.

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*Thomas Merton: Selected Essays.* Edited by Patrick F. O'Connell. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013. Pp. xviii + 493. \$50.

About two years ago, I tried again to read Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain*, only to put it down after about 30 pages remarking to myself that its shelf life had expired: it had become a period piece. Thus, it was with some hesitation, but also curiosity, that I accepted the invitation to review O'Connell's selection of 33 of M.'s essays. I am glad I did so.

In an appendix to this volume O'Connell lists, in chronological order, some 250 essays by M. written over his lifetime, indicating in bold print the 33 he is now