

Mark Searle. *Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual, and Social Perspectives*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006. 104 pages. \$11.95.

Most leaders of worship share a common nagging intuition. Despite their preoccupation with the sort of congregational engagement that is visibly vibrant, they sense that true participation runs much deeper than that which can be seen and heard. Mark Searle's *Called to Participate* offers a helpful map to those who would explore those further dimensions of participation and worship.

This volume is remarkable in a number of ways. First, the fact that it was published at all is a testament to the determination of both Mark (who wrote it in the throes of the illness that ended his life) and his editors (who labored mightily to tame an unwieldy manuscript). Second, the book offers far more wisdom than one might reasonably expect from its scant page count. And third, the insights in this work—rooted, as they are, in Roman Catholic sacramental theology—are strikingly ecumenical. At least this reviewer, an evangelical worship scholar and free church pastor, found something useful and generative on almost every page.

Chapter One positions Mark's treatment of participation in the region between two imperatives: that worshipers engage subjectively, on the one hand, and that they simultaneously relinquish "ownership" of the liturgy and "stand under" its objective demands. (13) In Chapter Two, the author sets out three nested "levels" of participation grounded in medieval sacramental theology. In Chapter Three, Mark focuses on the "inward/contemplative dimension of liturgy," examining Scripture readings, prayers, gestures, and time through the lens of a "sacramental mindset." (66) Finally, in Chapter Four, the author treats the "outward/public dimension of liturgy"—exploring worship as an unapologetically public action performed in solidarity with the world.

If this book has a center of gravity, it is Mark's refreshed treatment of the three "levels of participation." While these categories emerge from a thoroughly sacramental tradition, the author's treatment makes them broadly accessible. Mark's first level, "participation in ritual behavior," involves collective, formal, formative performance. His second level envisions "participation in the liturgy of the Church as the work of Christ." (27) The third and ultimate level is "participation in the life of God" (38–42)—understood as mystical union with the Godhead as well as involvement in God's ongoing mission in the world. The three levels make for a (trifocal!) prescription full of ecumenical promise; the recent resurgence of trinitarian thinking has drawn many to precisely the theological vista that Mark's lenses bring into focus.

Those concerned with homiletics will find much in this book to spark their thinking. The volume's central three-level perspective is one that some will want to illuminate with their preaching; it also suggests a usefully multi-angled way of thinking sacramentally about the homiletic act itself. Subsequent chapters offer a wealth of insights full of significance for preaching. If any theme is discernible, it is Mark's framing of the liturgical ministry of the Word as *broadly participative*. For example: Mark cogently prescribes "biblically-based catechesis" to equip the community to "undertake the hermeneutic required for hearing ancient texts as living word." (51–2). The author envisions a role for the preacher, as well, that is as participative as it is performative. In the face of a Story that cannot be fully conveyed by language, the best solution may not be more words, but rather, fewer of them; human utterances are best "heard as word of God" when they "float on a sea of silence." (58) Mark also argues for a broadly framed ecclesiology—one that throws off a prevalent "cult of intimacy" and envisions the Church as "a company of strangers." (73–5) Embracing such a self-consciously public identity, the liturgy

voices to the faithful an expansive calling: one that casts them as being more than merely onlookers, but rather *participants* in the earthly doings and divine redemption of human history.

For such a slender volume, *Called to Participate* stakes out a remarkably broad and rich vision of participation. The book will be useful not only to liturgists and homileticians, but also to anyone with a serious interest in the life of the Church. Even those familiar with the work's post-conciliar premises will find an idea or two refracted in fresh and helpful ways. As for me, I am very grateful that Mark Searle and his editors worked so heroically to bring this work to completion. They have done nothing less than convey the Gospel, authentically and thrillingly, as a call to *participate*.

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