

Jacob Daniel Myers. *Curating Church: Strategies for Innovative Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018. 198 pages. \$29.99.

In *Curating Church: Strategies for Innovative Worship*, Jacob Daniel Myers offers ministers and other church leaders the “motif of curation” as a way of equipping them to “engage more meaningfully with [their] contemporary cultural realities and move toward authentic transformation in ways that do not shut down but open up conversation and interpersonal engagement” (xxv). In the Introduction, Myers lifts up the Latin noun *cura*, which contains the double meaning of “care” and “cure.” He returns to these terms throughout the book as a way to reveal similarities between curators and church leaders: both “care” about the people and cultures with which they engage and hope that their work contributes in some manner toward the “cure” of personal and societal ailments. Both function as specialists in a particular area, conserving, filtering, and organizing materials within that area and, as the reliable experts, adding value to the things that they choose to present. While the materials they work with already exist within culture, both also help shape and transform culture by “reinforcing, challenging, and pruning the materials and concepts that will in turn reinforce, challenge, and prune future cultural artifacts” (xvii). Myers hopes to help church leaders do this work with greater intention and creativity by awakening their curatorial imaginations.

The rest of the book is divided into three “galleries.” Gallery I offers four examples of “theological and liturgical curation in action” from Meyer’s own experience as a leader of an experiential worship gathering called “rechurch” (xxiv). This community let go of the limiting structures of traditional and contemporary worship in order to create space to ask better questions and imagine creative ways to “foster engagement with God, with one another, and with the world God loves” (9). Myers leads us through the hopes of each experiment, points to practical and pastoral challenges that presented themselves, and offers glimpses of the transformation that was fostered in the community. His discussion of the theologically or otherwise problematic elements of the experiments gives the reader permission to make mistakes while encouraging ongoing critical reflection and conversation.

Gallery II shares the curatorial vision and critical reception of five art installations from around the world, with the hope of stimulating in the reader a curatorial sensibility and imagination that engages with cultures, conserves what is best in cultures, and seeks to trouble/transform cultures. Each section concludes with “liturgical takeaways” that the reader can glean from each installation as it relates to “curating church.” These almost seem to function as criteria, with the repeated phrase, “*Curating church ought...*” Myers notes relevant issues and questions that each exhibition raises, and imagines how a similar use of curatorial imagination could be put into practice in a liturgical context, usually by putting diverse voices in conversation with one another and creating space for congregants to engage with and reflect upon them in various ways. While the sometimes condensed language used in the “liturgical takeaways” might be difficult to follow for church leaders not already familiar with historical figures/events or concepts like destabilizing “hegemonic, colonial/imperial ideologies” (91), subverting “binary ways of thinking” (93), or “thinking along multiple axes of difference” (127), the audacious visions manifested in these diverse exhibitions are bound to galvanize the imagination of the reader and awaken the kind of new liturgical possibilities for which Myers is hoping.

Gallery III attends to isolationism, racism, and alienation in order to model what it looks like to engage with “matters of contemporary cultural and theological significance” with a curatorial imagination (137). Myers expresses hope that the reader will take the work he does

here and consider with a diverse group of people how to connect with, resource, and cultivate spaces of potential transformation in one's own context. While I wonder whether this section might have been strengthened by articulating the process that led Myers to the resources with which he engages as a way of showing the reader how they might start from nothing on a new issue, to do so might have offered the kind of limiting template Myers is trying to avoid. Regardless, this research will likely spark many creative experiments dreamt up by liturgical teams.

Curating Church will be a welcome resource for church leaders seeking to reimagine liturgy and engage more intentionally and creatively with the cultural realities of their congregations and larger communities. It will also serve well in worship courses as a way to help students imagine liturgical possibilities beyond the confines of traditional and contemporary worship.

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