

A Body of Meaning: Performance Arts and Human Development

Human beings are physical creatures who think, feel, and explore their world in and through their bodies. In the same way, we create and experience art through our bodies. Using the performing arts as a test case, we will examine how understanding the gifts of our bodies helps us understand nature of humans, art, artists, and the embodied nature of our faith.

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I. Rethinking the body and mind

A. What does it mean to believe in the “resurrection of the body”?

1. 1 Corinthians 15
2. Paul argues from the general belief in the resurrection to Christ’s particular resurrection
3. A typical argument for a Pharisee
4. Resurrection for Jews assumed a bodily resurrection, not the immortality of a disembodied soul.

B. How does this shape a Christian understanding of our humanity?

1. Genesis 2: 4-9
 - a. Body animated by God’s breath (*ruach*-spirit, wind)
 - b. Early Jewish understanding of the person was distinct from Greek and Roman thought of body and soul

2. We cannot exist without a body and still be ourselves

3. Our cognition is bodily

4. Embodied cognition: we can only know through our bodies

II. Performing Arts

A. Use of body to communicate

1. Signs, Words, Gestures

2. We can only send and receive “information” physically

B. The “Necessity of theatre”

1. We are not octopi

2. We learn by induction

3. We watch others

4. Others watch us

5. We learn by imitation

6. Our imitations are reinforced or corrected by others

7. Performing artists have the possibility of responding to responses in the moment.

8. Performing arts create conversations

a. Between artist and audience

- b. Within the audience
- c. Frequently these are without words
- d. Sometimes these can be deeply formative experiences for all
- e. These experiences can form us as individuals and communities
- f. This is especially important for those who are artists within a church, as they can deeply shape people's faith

Suggested Readings:

Craig-Snell, Shannon. *The Empty Church: Theatre, Theology, and Bodily Hope*. Oxford University Press, 2014..

Johnson, Todd, and Dale Savidge. *Performing the Sacred: Theology and Theatre in Dialogue*. Baker Academic, 2009

Vander Lugt, Wesley and Trevor Hart, eds. *Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the Faith*. Cascade, 2014.