

Let's act it out

George Halitzka

Staff Writer

The arts need no specific justification from Scripture any more than tracts or Christian radio need to be defended with chapter and verse. As a vehicle for using one's God-given gifts of creativity, communicating Biblical truth to others, and changing lives in the Holy Spirit's power, the arts should be embraced with open arms by Christians. For those who would look for specific passages, I encourage you to consider the following.

Although there is no specific mention of theater or mime used as

Jesus was a master storyteller. Who can imagine more powerful dramas than the parables of the Good Samaritan, the Unforgiving Servant and the Prodigal Son?

a ministry in the Bible, the Scriptures are full of drama! Robert M. Rucker, in "Producing and Directing Drama for the Church" (pp. 18-21), points out that Christian marriage, baptism and communion ceremonies all contain symbolic pantomimes. Also, "Isaiah was instructed to walk partially naked and barefoot" as a symbol of defeats to come (Isaiah 20). In the New Testament, Agabus gave Paul a vivid demonstration of the captivity that would be awaiting him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11).

Theater is nothing more than telling a story. Again, according to Rucker, "The books of Ruth, Esther and Job are exemplary of dramatic literature." Jesus was a master storyteller. Who can imagine more powerful dramas than the parables of the Good Samaritan, the Unforgiving Servant and the Prodigal Son? The ultimate drama is Christ's Passion, which has perhaps been retold more often and in more ways than any other story.

No one would deny that music as a form of worship is displayed and encouraged throughout the Scriptures (especially in Psalms). If there is a debate about music in ministry, it usually arises over the work of professional performers.

In both Old and New Testament times, professional musicians used their talents in synagogue worship, and according to Donald P. Hustad's "Jubilate II" (p. 76), these professionals apparently sang vocal solos. In the Biblical text, trained choirs were an important part of worship during the time of the monarchy (II Chronicles 5:11-13), Elisha was able to find a professional musician when he wanted one (II Kings 3:15), and we see some kind of professional singers mentioned in Nehemiah 7:44 and 10:28. David played harp solos for Saul, presumably "earning his keep" in that way (I Samuel 16:23). While I admit this is a bit of a stretch, God even seems to employ professional singers in heaven (Luke 2:13-14 and Revelation 8:11-12)!

Dance is also clearly a Biblical form of worship when done for the glory of God. J. Bruce Stewart, in his article entitled "Some Reflections on Liturgical Dance and Change" in the Summer 1994 issue of "Reformed Liturgy and Music," suggests several passages in defense of this art form. Psalm 150:4 encourages praising God with dancing. Examples of that principle in action are Miriam's dance after the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20-21) and King David's dancing in the streets (II Samuel 6:14).

Paul said, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (I Corinthians 9:22). If Paul became like a Jew, a slave, and one of the weak; we can certainly become "like an artist." In the obscurity of I Chronicles 11 and 12, we find a list of David's mighty men. Verse 32 of the Chronicles 12 contains a reference to "men of Isaachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do." What better way to "understand the times" than to learn our culture's artistic languages, both elite and popular? We are the ones who "know what Israel [our country and our world, by application] should do." What better way to communicate that knowledge than through the mediums which our culture understands best?

However, despite these biblical precedents, conservative evangelicals are still wary of using the performing arts in ministry. There are, undoubtedly, risks associated with doing so, but many of those same risks are involved in preaching and any other public ministry. It is time for the Church to stop being unnecessarily cautious and start following these biblical precedents. •