As most of you Prairie People know, I am very interested in the arts and in their relationship to religion. I have been doing considerable thinking on this relationship lately and hope to be sharing much of it with the Prairie in the next few months. I think that perhaps the most important initial step in this sharing needs to be an articulation of the difference between the arts used by the church (i.e., art that has its primary aim as use in the church; and thus has a sort of excuse for poor art) and religious art. These are my own private terms, so don't let them confuse you if in the past "religious art" has been used pejoratively; I think that in most cases that pejorative connotation is applied to what I refer to under the "arts used in the church."

I recently received some materials from the Religious Arts Guild of the UUA. In looking through the material I was struck with a sense of disappointment. There seems to be many people in many denominations who are interested in using the arts to make their worship more effective. Certainly this was the goal of the materials I received. But such an attitude places art in a subservient position, always forcing it to serve the functions required by a given church for a given theme. In such situations the church and the theme are the points of transcendent importance and any song or poem becomes merely a tool, something used for other purposes, something lacking in intrinsic value if taken out of the church context. The result of this is an obstruction of the artistic process, whether the art is created for the particular church use or is injected into it. In the first instance the creation of the art tends to become mere hack-work: "We need a little something on to put in the slot after the sermon and before the sermon; see what you can work up." In the second instance a fine work of art which has a meaning and a value all its own is injected into a context in which it is reduced to a slot, thus being understood and interpreted only relative to its function in the service.

Now I happen to be of the school of aesthetics which maintains that a piece of art must be able to stand isolated, on its own merits, and retain its meaning, value, and impact for its audience. For me all fine art is religious, even liturgical, for it all celebrates symbolically fundamental meanings, values, and actions (or life-styles). Neither hack work nor reductionism as practiced in the use of the arts in the church acknowledges this inherent religious quality in fine art, for such practice generally bolsters art with a church service (usually with what passes for piouness, religiosity, solemnity, etc.). What I hope we can do at Prairie is to allow the arts their own religious and liturgical function, that which inheres in their own medium and in each work's particular creation. Surely we do not and will not succeed all of the time. But if we are aware of the danger of the use of the arts in the church, perhaps we can more often succeed in creating religious art which will retain its value far beyond Prairie.

Dave Meyer
CAN AND BOTTLE PICKUPS

The Social Action committee has organized can and bottle pickups to take cans and bottles to the Coca-Cola Recycling Center for recycling.

Sunday, Jan. 17th is the date for the Personal Pickup Service. All you West Siders (sorry, everybody else is too scattered) will be contacted, to find out if you want your cans and bottles picked up at your house. If you aren’t contacted, don’t put them out!

Sunday, Jan. 31st is the date for the Church Pickup. Everybody bring your cans and bottles to the parking lot of the Fondue Chalet restaurant at the corner of Mifflin and Webster. Try to get there by 10:20. We will have receptacles there for you to separate your cans and bottles into.

We are trying both methods to see which is most successful. Let us know what you think. If the response is adequate, there will be more pickups in the future.

Questions call Ellie Friedman 257-3385 or Rosemary Dorney 238-4382.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Please note that the next meeting of the Play Reading Group has been changed to Sat. Jan. 23rd. It will meet at the Koehls', 3907 Fern Ct., at 7:30 p.m.


Reminder: Please remember to check out all Prairie activities with Pat Meyer who keeps the calendar so that conflicts will be avoided. All committee chairmen are asked to notify Joan Burns and Dave Meyer of the time and place of committee meeting.

Copies of Dave's sermon of Dec. 13 and the poems used in the Jan. 10 service will be available on Sunday morning.

SUMMER TOURS FOR HIGH SCHOOLERS

Brochures are now available for high schoolers who are interested in travelling in Mexico with 2 or 3 week tour-seminars, "The Image of Man in Mexico," with a Unitarian minister, the Rev. Dick Weston, this summer - or studying Spanish and the arts for 5 weeks in a colonial Mexican town under the guidance of his wife, Ann Weston. Check the brochure at the home of Lila Koehl or write Rev. Dick Weston, Unitarian Fellowship of Centre County, 709 Ridge Avenue, State College, Penna. 16801.

Newsletter Deadline

The deadline for the next newsletter (received Jan. 28) is Sunday, Jan. 24.