

**Maxwell, Nancy Kalikow.** *Sacred Stacks: The Higher Purpose of Libraries and Librarianship*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2006. 156 p. \$32 (\$28.80 for ALA members) (ISBN 0838909175). LC 2006-573.

Nancy Kalikow Maxwell has made a giant stride toward documenting what my mentor Edward G. Holley has often referred to as the "missionary impulse" of librarians. Drawing on her perspective formed by her Jewish roots and her master's degrees in library science (University of Missouri at Columbia) and Catholic theology (the first conferred on a Jewish recipient by Barry University), she addresses librarianship as a calling. In the preface and throughout the book, she "argues that libraries have survived, and will continue to thrive in the future, because they fulfill eternal needs of people. Like clergy and members of religious orders, librarians hold a sacred profession, albeit one performed in a secular setting."

Maxwell, currently an administrator at Miami Dade College North Campus Library, brings thirty years of experience in public and academic libraries as well as extensive reading and study to bear in this historical, sociological, theological, and philosophical discussion of the importance of libraries and librarians in American society. Chapter One: "Libraries as Sacred, Secular Institutions," compares library usage to prayer. Chapter Two: "Librarians Perform Sacred Functions," describes how "belief in the necessity of good works is evident in librarians' mission to service" and how the library is a growing organism that "can be seen as an expression of the immanence of the divine."

Chapter Three: "Librarians and Libraries Organize Chaos," praises libraries for maintaining at least a "generalized order" enabling library users to "locate the information they are seeking or stumble upon that which they need but did not know existed." Chapter Four: "Librarians and Libraries Bestow Immortality," summarizes that the written word is "one of the

best methods to provide life everlasting." Chapter Five: "Librarians and Libraries Uplift Individuals and Society," portrays libraries as key players in social justice movements "by providing not just knowledge to users but the inspiration to act on what they learn." Chapter Six: "Libraries Provide Sacred, Secular Space," addresses the paradoxical roles of libraries, where users come to the library as a place to be publicly in "the presence of others who have come there to read by themselves" as well as privately "to be alone with others who want to be alone."

Chapter Seven: "Librarians and Libraries Promote Community," promotes libraries as the "third place" (after home and work) for people to have access to regular, voluntary, informal gatherings. Chapter Eight: "Librarians and Libraries Transmit Culture to Future Generations," describes how libraries seek out, catalog, and preserve cultural information for future generations to discover. The concluding Chapter Nine: "Implications of Libraries as Sacred, Secular Institutions," exhorts librarians to speak out for libraries, demand spiritual, sacred space for library functions, remember the spirituality of books, demand space for books, demand libraries serve as communal space, balance libraries' public and private functions, control chaos, trumpet their ability to uplift individuals and society, and remember that they transmit culture and immortality. Maxwell also promotes the spirituality of libraries through fundraising and librarian recruitment.

Maxwell shares more than just her own perceptions by documenting thoroughly in notes and bibliography her familiarity with major works in the history, sociology, and philosophy of learning and libraries. This slim compact volume will inspire, perhaps even provoke, anyone interested in the spiritual dimension of libraries and librarianship from library school students and general lovers of libraries to seasoned curmudgeons who think they have heard it all. — *Plummer Alston "Al" Jones, Jr., East Carolina University.*