

VICAR'S JUNE MESSAGE 2006 - Father Anthony Holder

WORSHIP AND EVANGELISM – DO THEY BELONG TOGETHER?

In the book, In Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism, Patrick R. Keifert endeavors to show that liturgical worship and effective evangelism belong together within an intimate society as people seek to become comfortable in church. He references Richard Sennett's book, The Fall of the Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism, identifying four social and psychological factors why public worship is viewed in private, intimate terms and adds a fifth in the process.

According to Keifert, since the church's greatest opportunity for evangelism comes during public worship, liturgical worship and effective evangelism are linked through a unique understanding of offering hospitality to the stranger. He identifies two modern undercurrents that prevent the integration process: "the ideology of intimacy" (24) and the ideology of individualism and the separation of the public and the private imagery. He reasons that cultural intimacy hinders hospitality, causing strangers to be passive observers, afraid of being shamed or placed under public scrutiny. Individualism and the separation of facts (public) and values (private) have complicated this difficulty.

Keifert claims that society's private view of modern dogma, faith, religion, and the church have fueled "the self-consciousness most individuals feel during worship" (36). The answer to this self-consciousness is found in liturgy and liturgical renewal. He explores three currents (red, green and yellow) of liturgical renewal, arguing that they were "diseased by the modern undercurrents" (55), preventing the health of public worship and the organization of a viable public life outside the church. Keifert suggests there is a need for liturgical renewal, citing worship as not a private affair but a place for the stranger. He infers that since God is "the host of public worship" (58), everyone at public worship is God's guest, whether the person is a member or a visitor.

The author believes that the Church must see itself as "an evangelical conversation and life on behalf of the world, characterized by hospitality to the stranger" (87). This entails changing, or modifying the language of the church as a family, which tends to determine "who is part of the family and who is not" (91). Using the analogy of baseball, he states that liturgical churches can bridge the public and the private dimensions of the Christian life by having an "at home" service, catering to regular worshipers and an "away" service for new converts, visitors and seekers; a concept that existed in the early Church.

Exploring the initiation rites of Hippolytus' The Apostolic Tradition, Keifert describes a sevenfold process of liturgical evangelism, emphasizing the importance of rituals in liturgical evangelism, to strangers and people in general. He affirms that "ritual builds the social barriers necessary for effective interaction," (110) and we ought to develop strategies for creating rituals. He also argues for "ritual competence" and "ritual resourcefulness" citing that the latter needs the former. In order to understand public life and to plan public worship, Keifert tells us that worship planners must understand four

realities about public life, rely on tradition and scripture, faith experience and culture and follow a four-step planning process so as to plan worship that conforms to the “liberative presence of God” (153) and is hospitable to strangers.

Welcoming the Stranger is a challenging application in Christian hospitality, helpful in appreciating liturgy, evangelism and ritual, and creating a space that makes the stranger feel welcomed and comfortable. For me, what is very significant is the fact that although we may welcome the stranger into our midst, yet we are not the hosts, God is. Hence, our welcome is to be done in the context that we are all guests in God’s house and presence, equally sharing in his love. I welcome this book in that having read Sally Morgenthaler’s book, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God*, which is more suited for non-liturgical churches, Keifert’s book is applicable for a liturgical church setting like mine. I will use it in my ministry as we seek to discern and provide an “away” type of worship service that is more hospitable to strangers in our community.

*[Taken from a review I wrote on the book - **In Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism**, by Patrick R. Keifert]. The numbers in parentheses are page references.*