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# The witness of the worshipping community: liturgy and the practice of evangelism

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While the book is designed for preachers, preachers in the lectionary tradition will find it harder to use directly because of its topical design. However, to aid accessibility the editor has added, under each major topic, several related topics and, more importantly, applicable biblical texts, all of which are then connected to a Subject Index and a Biblical Index. Quite apart from this direct homiletical use, Milton is always good for stimulation and sermonic start-up, for not only do his stories invite the imagination to run, his reflections also provoke. He makes one direct plea to preachers when he takes up "Death": "...if you know where you are on the subject of life after death, please for the sake of us confused souls in the back pew, preach it. If you don't know, could you do some thinking and praying and reading, so that you can help us think it through? As more of us become long of tooth and gray of hair, our interest in the subject is more than casual. What's in store? Compost or celestial choir?" (50).

We used the book profitably for devotions, and these stories, anecdotes, and reflections will serve also as fine discussion starters with educational and Bible study groups.

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## **The Witness of the Worshiping Community: Liturgy and the Practise of Evangelism**

Frank Senn

New York: Paulist Press, 1993

177 pp. \$20.00 Cdn.

Frank Senn is a Lutheran pastor, and currently president of the Liturgical Conference. This challenging book, which is a reaction to the watering-down of traditional worship by the forces of the church growth movement, has two foci: Worship and Witness. Senn suggests that these two concepts have become artificially separated, and that this goes against Scripture. This, he says, has crippled both worship and witness.

Senn criticizes clergy and national church staff for "buying into the principles of the Church Growth Movement, in a last-ditch attempt to stem membership hemorrhaging" (3). He claims that "there needs to be a more secure connection between liturgy and evangelism...that churches which take seriously the liturgy as their primary form of public witness, need to develop a liturgical evangelism" (4).

In the opening chapters, he defines "right worship" over against its contemporary corruptions: utilitarianism, evangelism, aestheticism, pietistic revivalism, and as a tool of church extension. He claims that liturgical worship, according to the model of the catholic tradition as it has been inherited and reformed in our time, when properly focussed, is a worthy vehicle for witnessing to the catholic/evangelical faith.

In subsequent chapters, he develops this argument in relation to several types of liturgical worship experience, illustrating how they can be employed to witness to the visitor among us: "The Witness of Baptism"; "The Witness of the Eucharist"; "When the Public Comes to Church" (confirmation, weddings, funerals, Christmas, Easter); "Liturgy and Evangelism" (the church year and its outreach themes).

In his last chapter, "Christian Initiation", Senn explores the possibilities of a parish catechumenate program for witness and outreach. In the fifth chapter, right in the middle of the book, he offers a digression on hospitality and inculturation, two themes of current interest to scholars and practical worship leaders alike today.

Throughout his discussions, Senn is adamant in defending the traditional liturgical style of worship over against so-called "contemporary worship", which, he says, so mirrors the culture that it loses all sense of Gospel as being "over against" contemporary life. He is uncompromising in his criticism of the "unbiblicism" of this modern approach to worship.

Pastors who speak and write like Senn are often criticized for being unbending, stuffy, and over-traditional. One current joke even compares them to terrorists. (Q: What is the difference between a terrorist and a liturgist? A: You can negotiate with a terrorist.)

People today do not want to hear such hard words about their faith, and about the importance of choosing carefully and theologically what they do on Sunday morning. Yet hard writing, such as Senn offers here, is undeniably honest stuff, and we ignore it at our peril. There is no denying any longer the "worship wars" going on in the church culture around us, especially among evangelists and fundamentalists, and in churches with pastors for whom "relevancy", "success", and "effectiveness" are the key concepts that govern ministry, rather than tradition or faithfulness.

Senn presents us with a choice: either follow the culture, and the churches which mirror our culture, on their way down the road to conformity, or cling to the inherited tradition, as it has been reformed in our own time. This book provides lots of handles and anchors, to help us recover the "witness" and "outreach" edge which is inherent in our worship tradition.

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