

Deborah J. Kapp. *Worship Frames: How We Shape and Interpret Our Experience of God*. Herndon, VA: Alban, 2008. 129 pages. \$17.00

If worship can be understood as the way a church practices what it preaches, then *Worship Frames* will improve both the practice and preaching. Deborah's book is part of the Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations series, a partnership between the Alban Institute and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, designed to strengthen congregational life through worship. *Worship Frames* provides congregational worship leaders and preachers with an analytic tool that will sharpen, focus, and deepen perspectives on the shared task of worship and preaching.

Deborah leads the reader step by step through a carefully constructed presentation of "frames" drawn from the field of sociology. A "frame" in this context is understood as a frame of reference, a construct, or grid of consciousness that is used to make sense of experience. Framing utilizes sound, movement, sight, language, and symbols to "shape the nature of an experience or event" and "evoke particular values or worldviews" (11). A memorable example can be found in a recent TV advertisement. A gathering of people appears on the screen. We scan them without any particular focus until suddenly a pair of human hands appears, coming between viewers and the view. As the hands come together and form the shape of a valentine around one particular face in the crowd, we realize that face and we have been "framed," drawn into a narrative of longing, a relationship of delight. The case studies in the book demonstrate this same potential for worship framing as a means to transform a congregation's perception of its life as a beloved community.

Deborah draws on the sociological work of Erving Goffman, credited with developing frame analysis, to introduce her basic approach to framing in the context of worship. She summarizes a complex field with concise outlines and examples, and closes each chapter with leading questions and reference for further study and discussion. Two key definitions of framing are used in the presentation of the material: boundary frames and discursive frames. "Boundary frames work by using brackets that delineate the extent and shape the nature of an experience or event" (11). Diverse patterns of worship are explored using this definition, such the theological function of a processional with robed liturgical leaders compared to leaders wearing street clothes who are seated in the congregation as the service begins. Insights for preaching can be drawn from the "brackets that mark the beginning/and ending of a service as they shape some of the congregation's expectation of the style of preaching as well as the nature of proclamation itself."

Out of the many means we have to understand the way we pray, preach, or sing, "framing" can function as a primary grammar to nurture the work of communication and communion within a faith community. Being able to translate as well as shape deep structures of meaning into liturgies and sermons is a primary task of pastoral leadership and transformative preaching.

The chapter on preaching frames takes up the topic of discursive frames that work through "metaphors or other speech acts that express, shape, and evoke particular values or worldviews" (11). The framing of a congregation's identity through preaching is one way to name a congregation's vocation, for example.

The author explores the work of four nationally recognized Chicago preachers through the construct of framing: John Fry of First Presbyterian Church, Jeremiah Wright of Trinity United Church of Christ, Elam Davies of Fourth Presbyterian Church, and Michael Pflieger of the Faith Community of St. Sabina. The strength of this use of homiletical framing in situations of

change is clearly demonstrated in the review she provides of these preachers and their congregations. (It should be noted that she confines her review of Wright's preaching to the sermons preached in the 1990s, and does not extend her commentary to the controversy connected to the presidential election.)

As an urban study of four premier pulpit ministries in one of the nation's great cities the strength of the study is its primary focus on framing as a powerful construct for engaging ecumenical cooperation to meet the critical challenge of congregations facing social and cultural change. As most congregations, rural or urban, lay led or staffed by seminary trained clergy, experience this shifting landscape on a weekly basis, *Worship Frames* should be put to the test of improving congregational vision through the renewal of perceptive worship and visionary preaching.

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