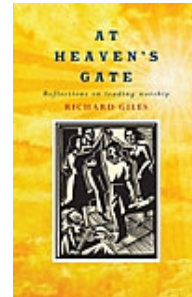


## **At Heaven's Gate**

*Reflections on leading worship*

Richard Giles

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In the preface to this remarkable book, the former Rabbi of Society Hill Synagogue in Philadelphia, Ivan Caine, recalls how, when he first met Richard Giles and heard of his plans to re-order Philadelphia Cathedral, he thought he was either a madman or a prophet. By the end of the book, there is no doubt that the latter is the truth. But prophets can be deeply uncomfortable and as the author takes us on a journey through the succinct and penetrating principles which have guided his thinking about worship and liturgy over nearly half a century, one feels sometimes challenged as well as excited and sometimes mildly irritated as well as hugely inspired.

Many clergy and others who care about worship will already have Richard Giles' other titles on their shelves. But this short, punchy volume is a very different kind of read. In arresting and accessible language, Richard unravels the ways in which he believes worship can be "*a breathtaking encounter with the living God*", rather than "*a comfortable gathering of the likeminded*" - something he feels that Anglican worship has all too often become.

However, this is no mere practical guide to worship. After laying out the possibilities and problems of making "*this odd collection of misfits we call 'church' ...into a community of transformation*" Richard takes us through a clear summary of the building blocks and characteristics of good worship and the vital importance of worship engaging with the world which gives it context. All of this is based on sound theological principles, and a firm belief that there is no place for sloppiness, poor preparation or indecisive leadership. Indeed the importance of competent presidency is something of a leitmotif throughout the book.

It is a pity that, having remarked that "*In worship we aspire to come to the very threshold of the heavenly places*" he goes on to debunk cathedral evensong as fossilized. Also, many will disagree with the idea that "*the good preacher learns early on to let go of a full written text*". However, such comments are all part of the stimulating and passionate wake-up call that he offers us on every page.

As a true Anglican, Richard Giles transcends churchmanship boundaries and cannot be "owned" by any particular "party" within Anglicanism – one reason why this book deserves to be widely read. Another is that it is short enough to say everything that needs saying and sufficiently profound to merit returning to over and over again.

Bruce Ruddock

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