

Teresa Berger and Bryan D. Spinks, eds. *Liturgy's Imagined Past/s: Methodologies and Materials in the Writing of Liturgical History Today*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016. 35 pages. \$35.

*Liturgy's Imagined Past/s* provides an account of multiple aspects of Christian word and worship on a global level spanning across several centuries. The book's multiple contributors examine a wide variety of liturgical life including the significance of clergy vestments, hymns, corporate prayers, the architecture of the early Christian church, the Coptic Church, monasticism, the Reformation and beyond. Although the book's primary audience includes liturgical studies scholars and students, the content draws from the integration of historiography and aspects of systematic theology. Berger and Spinks have provided exemplary liturgical scholarship despite the scarcity of several ancient manuscripts and the challenges of recovering traditions and theological intentions from the ancient world.

In chapter 5, Berger raises the issue of the Church's history on embracing gender-obliviousness as deeply embedded in the fabric of corporate worship and especially its liturgical life. The author refrains from deconstructing liturgical history, but rather attempts to make sense of it with respect to the role of gender. Not until the twentieth century have some faith traditions begun including women among the ranks of ordained clergy in significant numbers. Furthermore, until the latter part of the twentieth century the Church's oral and written liturgy across ecumenical lines exclusively used masculine pronouns when referring to Divine attributes. However, Berger as one of a few scholars have raised the issue of the role of gender in worship in the form of style and implied associations beyond mere words and expressions. "A few faith communities aim for more 'masculine' worship experiences so as to counter a perceived feminization of worship that they see expressed, for example, in the preponderance of 'girly worship' songs" (138). The relevance of such claims rests in the idea that liturgy contains an implied gender associations through its means of expression and its perception by the respective participants. One cannot assume that aesthetics within the context of worship entails gender neutrality in terms of its appeal.

The book makes a significant contribution to the discipline of liturgical studies. "Teresa Berger is undoubtedly correct in referring to the underlying suppositions of contemporary liturgical approaches to historical analyses, which emphasize fragmentariness, discontinuity, difference, and are obviously fueled by a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'" (113). Nevertheless, more attention to liturgical difference would strengthen the volume, such as an additional chapter or two that discuss how African Diaspora Christian communities in the Americas have appropriated aspects of formal worship in conjunction with their forms of sacred traditions. A significant portion of liturgical studies literature has omitted the influential role of sub-Saharan Africa on Western religious practices in terms of its use of rhythm, tones, and various other sensibilities.

One of the book's greatest strengths lies in its concise theological explanation of the Sacrament of The Lord's Supper as it relates to the Passover meal prior to the death of Egyptian during the ancient world and how Christ revisited the sacred celebration prior to his crucifixion. Bruce Gordon, the author of chapter 7 reminds the reader that "the Lord's Supper is a bringing to mind or revisualizing of Christ's death on the cross" (194). Furthermore, the author implicitly claims that the Lord's Supper should not become dismissed as a mundane ritual but rather essential for keeping the memory of God's work of salvation alive and worthy of thanksgiving in the form a continuous celebration.

The contributors devote the latter sections of the book to the Reformed tradition and Evangelicalism as early movements which began an era of gradual decline of centralized authority which serve as a reference point “to imagine the future” (231). The book emphasizes how Jesus Christ functions as the sole source of authority for Christianity (242). However, such generalized assumption must consider that surface level theological homogeneity becomes challenged through diverse spiritual experiences, ethnic variety, its accompanying linguistics, and the distinct characteristics of local church organizational structures.

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