

## [Review] *Liturgy in Migration: From the Upper Room to Cyberspace*, edited by Teresa Berger

CHRISTOPHER J. MONTGOMERY

Christopher J. Montgomery, O.S.L., is the pastor of Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He holds degrees from The Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies (D.W.S.), Biblical Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and Ouachita Baptist University (B.A.). He is a provincial companion of the Order of Saint Luke, a dispersed religious order dedicated to liturgical scholarship and sacramental spirituality.



**Berger, Teresa, editor. *Liturgy in Migration: From the Upper Room to Cyberspace*.**

Collegetown, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2012. 311pp. ISBN 978-0-8146-6275-5.

One of the New Testament's preferred metaphors for the church is the body. The epistles repeatedly refer to the Christian community as the body of Christ, built up of various members and parts, striving for unity through their own individual functions. From a biological perspective, the metaphor of the body connotes great complexity in relationship and form. Each part of the body must simultaneously fulfill its own role

while maintaining its vital connection to every other part. That the letters to the early church draw on this metaphor should astonish and terrify us.

Throughout its history, the Anabaptist tradition in which I pastor has strongly emphasized the role of community in Christian life, biblical interpretation, and discernment. Through often egalitarian authority structures and suspicion of clerical caste, we speak and act out of a genuine belief that we all belong to each other as much as we belong to Christ. Our worship, however, tends to demonstrate something different. For all our conversation and deep theologies about community, we (and, I assume, other traditions, too) tend to forget that entire communities, denominations, movements, and even generations are connected to each other. And perhaps most broadly speaking, we bear a human connection that extends beyond the church to all peoples. What are we learning from others—even those from a different tradition or culture?

The work of liturgical contextualization demands mindful attention to the way in which the church is intimately interconnected as one body with many parts in many places. The language, customs, habits, and even emotional processes of one culture often do not match another. Add to the cultural divide the geographical and temporal distance of the church, spread across an entire planet and twenty centuries, and we begin to grasp the need to carefully consider how the liturgy moves and speaks in each individual setting.



*Liturgy in Migration*, edited by Teresa Berger, is a collection of 13 essays on the church's efforts to contextualize the liturgical gift given by our ancestors, with chapter topics ranging from worship in medieval convents (chapter 4, by Gisela Muschiol) to Hispanic veneration of the cross (chapter 9, by Raúl Gómez-Ruiz) to Greek Orthodox architecture in the United States (chapter 7, by Kostis Kourelis and Vasileios Marinis). It presents an excellent cross-section of the church, respecting contributions to the broader worship conversation by the church in the global east and south.

Graham Ward opens the collection with an appropriately placed look at “belonging” in the life of the church. He unapologetically places the work of all liturgical contextualization in the worship practice of the historic church: “In calling tradition our teacher, we are actually making a profound theological gesture, for it is the Spirit of Christ who leads us into all truth. . . . it is a witness amid the cloud of witnesses; it is a participation in the hymn of thankfulness offered by the communion of the saints” (16). His placement of the ongoing discussion and work of contextualization within the framework of community grounds the reader in the New Testament body metaphor: a reminder that no faithful Christian work occurs in isolation. If the liturgy is to be faithful, he asserts, we must remember that we need each other.

The essays progress from historical explorations to contemporary work in cultural communication. Of particular interest to me is Stefan Bonbert's concluding essay on the role of digital media, particularly the internet, and the church's grappling with its effect on Western culture. In discussing the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy's “symbols perceptible to the senses,” Bonbert offers a warning that should be heeded even by non-technological congregations in the preaching-centric Protestant tradition: “Liturgy lives in sensory, embodied forms; it engages human beings in their bodily senses and derives much of its power precisely from this. If a liturgical celebration is to open up space for an encounter between God and human beings, then this encounter cannot but include the whole of the human person” (290). Bonbert's assertion echoes the theme of the entire volume, that true contextualization is mindful of the fullness of each human body, beyond mere intellect, and the fullness of the ecclesial body, beyond the Enlightenment.

In each essay, readers are confronted with the complexity of their roles as planners, leaders, and teachers of worship. Very little of liturgical practice in one setting can simply be placed in another setting without consequences. This volume is an in-depth reminder that, while the liturgy may offer an indispensable *pattern*, it should never be reduced to a *template*. Readers should think very cautiously about prefabricated worship service templates designed to ease the work of pastors and worship leaders—especially after working through these hearty essays, which portray faithful Christians working diligently to overcome cultural obstacles, to

“open up space for an encounter” with God. Each part of the body is unique and perceives reality differently. The liturgy, this book argues, has demonstrated its capacity for cultural personalization.

The value of this book goes beyond the case studies which highlight the various and beautiful ways that liturgical and devotional practice has been faithfully contextualized through the church’s history. In fact, the entire volume shows that the liturgy can always be translated, sung, painted, and prayed in any culture. These essays serve as a testament not only to the flexibility of the gift of liturgical practice but also to the depth of beautiful diversity that exists within the body it graces.

As a scholar–practitioner of Christian worship and a pastor in a tradition that tends toward cultural isolationism, I am enriched by the message of this book. The broad community of the church that exists throughout history and across the globe needn’t frighten us; neither should the culture in which that church exists. There are healthy, faithful ways for my Anabaptist context to redeem the habits and practices of a culture we view with suspicion, while simultaneously maintaining the distinctiveness of our theology and embracing the fullness of the body of Christ. When we can do that, I suspect that we will more fully understand our core value: that the Christian life is only complete when it is lived in community.

I highly recommend this text to pastors and worship leaders looking to deepen their engagement with liturgical contextualization. It will enlighten and inspire liturgists to consider carefully how the pattern of the liturgy is embodied and performed in their own settings. It will also encourage the reader to see the way the church strives, and sometimes fails, in the ongoing, dynamic complexity of being one body with many parts.