

Introduction of the *Berakah* Recipient

Nathan P. Chase

Nathan Chase (1990-2025) was Assistant Professor of Sacramental and Liturgical Theology at Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri. A lengthier biography appears with his article in Part 3.

It is an honor to introduce this year's Berakah recipient, Teresa Berger, and it is only fitting that I begin my introduction inviting all of creation to join us in this encomium of our esteemed colleague, from the star dust to bacteria, from the minerals that make up our planet to the elephants that wander the savanna, from the zeros and ones of code to the angelic choirs of heaven, from the wildflowers of the meadows to the creatures of the sea. However, I would be remiss to fail to announce this festal day particularly to the bees, since according to ancient custom, particularly in Germany, people would announce to the bees feast days and special celebrations. And so to the bees I say: "Bieneli, freuet euch! Teresas-Tag ist da! [Little bees, rejoice! Teresa's day is here.]"

I will never forget my first interaction with Teresa, which was while I was a graduate student working for Pray Tell blog. I had been tasked with reaching out to the contributors, and she was one of the first people on my list. By that point in time, I had read some of her work and also saw the @yale.edu pop up with her email. I was thoroughly intimidated. What should have been a quick-to-write email asking a simple question, took at least 30 minutes as I read and reread the email about 12 times. Her response came shortly after and, as has always been the case, was extremely kind and gracious. This is one of the hallmarks of Teresa, her kindness and graciousness, especially to younger scholars.

As I read more of Teresa's work, I started to think about the trajectory of her scholarship, the breadth of which is truly immense, spanning Methodist hymnody and Tractarianism, women and gender in worship and the construction of liturgical history, to more recently migration, cyberspace, and cosmic worship. Throughout each work, you can hear a prophetic voice, a voice concerned: for those on the margins of history and the church, for the voiceless, for practices and pieties deemed outside the so-called norm. For me, and likely many in this room, Teresa has always been a prophetic voice in a Church in need of such voices, and likewise on the cutting edge of scholarship in the academy.

Among her more recent books, *@Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* published in 2018 took up the way God moves among the pixels. It asks questions about digital mediation. Two years later what was a largely scholarly discussion about liturgy and digitality became an issue of dire pastoral need with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. We were all now wrestling theologically and pastorally with what Teresa had already engaged in *@Worship*.

Prophetic.

Her current work *Benedicite*, seeks to de-center humans in the story of creation, noting the way in which all of creation praises and worships the Creator. It is written in response to climate change and the humanmade collapse of our planet. Nearly every day we can read on the news the death of a glacier or the imminent collapse of the Atlantic Ocean currents or another tragic event for our planet.

Prophetic.

Of course, one cannot forget her earlier works, like *Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical History*, which pushed the field, especially liturgical historians, to look for the voices of women in history and to see the gendered reality of our historical narratives.

Prophetic.

Throughout her work and her mentorship and in her personal interactions with her colleagues, Teresa has been a source of humor and joy, asking questions and proposing lines of inquiry that most could never conceive. It is her breadth of knowledge of the sources, both the well-known ones and the fragments from the voices often ignored or silenced by history, that makes her questions and comments so insightful.

Having been graced by pictures of gorgeous blooming flowers from her garden this past year, I think her garden perfectly symbolizes her and her work. I once remarked that while each of the individual pictures of the flowers she sent me in her garden were stunning, I imagined the experience of her garden *in toto* was a thing of true beauty. She replied, “I know that nothing will convince you that my garden isn’t this gorgeous place (and this [latest] photo won’t help) but overall it is a small, wild, mostly neglected place! I am just very attentive to the little beauties that do emerge there.”

Teresa, the breadth of your scholarship and work has not been small or neglected—though perhaps to some (though not me) a bit wild! In any event, your support of the voiceless, the marginalized, and the way you are providing a voice to the cosmos “groaning in labour pains until now” (Rom 8:22), you have been attentive to the little beauties—the little gems and quieted voices in history, the

fragments that others have passed over, and the paths that others have feared to go down. Altogether, you have created a beautiful garden, scholarly and otherwise, that sings in harmony with all of creation to God our Creator.

Thank you. Thank you for your work.