

# Problems in the Early History of Liturgy

**Convener:** Jim Sabak, OFM (jimsabak@gmail.com) is a Franciscan Friar of the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Atlanta, Georgia) and Director of Worship for the Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina, and episcopal emcee for the bishop of Raleigh.

**Members in Attendance:** John Baldwin, Teresa Berger, Paul Bradshaw, Harald Buchinger, J. Glenn Byer, Nathan Chase, Charles Cosgrove, Rick Fabian, Maxwell Johnson, Ruth Langer, Lizette Larson-Miller, Clemens Leonhard, Anne McGowan, David Pitt, Nick Russo, Jim Sabak, Dominic Serra

**Visitors in Attendance:** Julie Canlis, Lucas Christensen, Paul Elhallal, Peter Keyser, Reed Miller, Alex Neroth van Vogelpoel, Jordan Sandrock

**Description of Work:** Our mission is to study issues in Christian and Jewish liturgical history through the early centuries of the Common Era.

## **Papers and Presentations:**

- Teresa Berger: “Worship in Communion with Everything Created: Glimpses from the Early Christian Centuries.” In this paper (part of her new research project titled *Benedicite*), she argued that the topos of the worship of God by everything created is present across a diversity of early Christian ritual practices, in key liturgical elements such as daily prayer and the Eucharist. With this, Berger challenged the field of liturgical studies to move beyond its often unquestioned and undertheorized anthropocentricity.
- Harald Buchinger: “Christian Liturgy in Late Antique Jerusalem.” The chapter provides an introduction to the history, form and characteristics of the unique Jerusalem liturgy, to its sources and the respective bibliography. Beyond an overview of the well-researched celebrations, it also integrates overlooked aspects and phenomena that have only recently emerged, among others, from the Sinai “new finds.”
- Nathan Chase: “Furnaces, Candles, and Other Tricks: Christian Clergy as Baptismal ‘Magicians’.” This presentation begins by briefly summarizing the scriptural and non-scriptural accounts of the appearance of fire and light on the water during Jesus’ baptism. It then looks at liturgical, literary, and material sources from the fourth century to early medieval period, primarily in the West, that may indicate that the tricks and artifices so objectionable to the author of *De Rebaptismate* were actually embraced by Nicene Christians,

though the link to the debate that animated *De Rebaptismate* became largely forgotten.

- Charlie Cosgrove: “Purposes and Pleasures,” the final chapter of his forthcoming book, *A History of Christian Psalmody: From the Pauline Mission to the End of the Fifth Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press). The chapter treats various uses and enjoyments of psalmody in a variety of settings.
- Ruth Langer: “‘And I Will Remember the Land’—The Land in Jewish Liturgical Memory.” This paper argues that the focus of rabbinic Jewish liturgical memory is a complex of ideas that center around the loss of the Jerusalem Temple and its sacrifices in the Judean defeat by Rome and the consequent loss of political sovereignty, marked by theological (and for many, real) exile from the Land; the eschatological *memoria futuri* reverses these national tragedies. Because most Jewish liturgists asking about Jewish memory themselves participated in the modern liberal Jewish rejection of this complex of ideas, it has not been named in the literature. This has consequences for dating the emergence of the rabbinic system of verbal worship.
- Clemens Leonhard: “The Rabbinic Brakha over Bread, the Eucharist, and the Manna: Traces of Dialogue?” The paper discussed the background of the wording of ... God, “who brings forth bread from the land.” Suggesting that the blessing evokes the situation of Israel’s entry into the promised land in Joshua 5, the first celebration of Pesach therein, and the ensuing end of God’s gift of the manna, it asked whether the Rabbis had a Christian appropriation of the manna as a precursor of the Eucharist in mind when they formulated the blessing. In that case, the blessing would preserve traces of a rabbinic acknowledgement of Christian liturgies. Although the typology manna-Eucharist was only rarely hinted at in the epoch of the origins of the wording of the blessing, earlier Jewish, e.g., Philo of Alexandria, and later Christian sources (John 6 and prominently Origen [in Caesarea]) shared a metaphorical/allegorical interpretation of the manna as God’s Torah or, conversely, Jesus’ teaching. As Menachem Kister has observed, the Rabbis avoided the allegorical interpretation of the manna—perhaps conspicuously—although it was brought forward by Jewish scholars. In the discussion of the Seminar, it was objected that the evidence does not suffice to reconstruct a Christian-Jewish debate on this issue and that the assumption of an allusion to Ps 104:14 (together with Gen 3:17-19) explains the rabbinic form of the blessing.
- Nick Russo: “Oaths and Oath-taking among the Christians of Pontus: Revisiting Pliny.” In his letter to Trajan about his investigation of Christians in Pontus ca. 110-111CE, Pliny reports that the group met on a fixed day before dawn to sing a hymn to Christ and to take an oath to avoid certain crimes and immoral acts. Scholars have assumed that Pliny must have misunderstood what he gleaned from the Christians he interrogated and have variously interpreted this oath (*sacramentum*) as reference to the Eucharist, a baptismal vow, a ritual recitation of the Decalogue, or (indirectly) to the moral exhortations of a weekly service of the word. The paper noted the problems with

each of these interpretations and argued for the plain view first advanced by A. D. Nock: the Christians of Pontus took oaths during the course of their regular community gatherings. The paper further argued that this practice, evidently short-lived and localized, may have been adopted to address two needs: from within, to ritualize the moral formation of new members; from without, to respond to the widespread suspicion that Christians engaged in various crimes and immoral acts in the course of their clandestine meetings.

**Other Work and Plans for the Future:** The seminar will continue its mission into the future and will entertain a call for papers in September.