

Berger, Teresa 1998 – Women's ways of worship: gender analysis and liturgical history.

Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press. 180 Pages. US\$ 21.95

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In my 21 years as a lecturer in theology, I have addressed numerous women's groups, mainly within the Reformed tradition. These meetings always consist of two parts, a "business" part focusing on fundraising

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through baking and needlework activities, followed by a talk by an invited guest, usually a man. Taking into account that the churches to which these women belong, will not survive financially without their selfless work, and giving credit to the women for trying to expand their horizons, I am nevertheless always struck by the lack of any liturgies performed at such meetings. Although the meetings are always closed by a tea or soup drinking ceremony, these can hardly be called liturgical or even ceremonious. It is simply culturally habitual for these people to drink tea or coffee together whenever somebody visits.

In her book *Women's ways of worship*, Teresa Berger points to sources for reconstructing Christianity's liturgical life. Most of her search centres around the absence of women from public liturgy. However, this search has some positive outcomes. Turning towards women's "private" liturgical activities, Berger finds the following sources for repositioning women in liturgy: (1) She identifies the life experiences of "ordinary" women, centring around pregnancy, birth, menstruation and death, as markers for liturgy. (2) She searches through archaeological evidence, such as mosaics, images, statues, gravestone inscriptions and devotional objects, as pointers towards women's liturgical needs. (3) She reclaims a liturgical narrative for women by searching in liturgical history for traces of women's involvement and possible bonding.

Although Berger intends to reclaim *all* of the history of liturgy for women, she only endeavours to do so with regard to the liturgical history of the early church and the twentieth century Women's Liturgical Movement in Germany.

Berger concentrates on periods of when women's participation in liturgy flourished – what remains of this history is not encouraging. While women participated in liturgical formation in primitive Christianity, they were discouraged from attending worship from AD 320 onwards. In subsequent centuries women were openly targeted by liturgical taboos. So successful was this movement in the church that even today women still do not see themselves as liturgical agents, something hinted at in the introduction to this review.

Berger's main contribution to the discussion of women's liturgical agency, is her description of women's roles in the liturgical movement in the Roman Catholic Church during the early twentieth century in Germany. Here clearly is a case of women actively playing formative roles as liturgical agents, but being rendered invisible by historians. Berger retrieves and describes many of these roles played by women. She emphasises women's roles as liturgical educators and their participation in devotional books on liturgies directed towards women as their audience. She points to the fact that the "liturgical study clubs" which sprang up in the wake of the movement largely consisted of women, and that women as academics engaged in liturgical research.

Eventually this renewal developed into a full-blown Women's Liturgical Movement in the 1970s, carefully described by Berger. Today Catholic women (in Germany?) perform and have access to liturgies that are participatory, aministerial, playful and flexible, liturgies that include liturgical dancing and ritual anointing. Anointing is practised when women are raped, and when they are healing from an abortion. These liturgies are contextual and reflect women's struggle for justice. They are creative in the formation of symbols, and show a predilection for poetic language. They reflect women's concerns for nature.

Although this book originates from a German context, it is an important book for South African women to read, both Catholic and Protestant. Women in South Africa have not yet empowered themselves or bonded with one another through liturgical activity. Although they are experts in bringing women together around a tea table – an excellent place for liturgical activity – they have not yet used their creative abilities in this respect and become liturgical agents. In her description and analysis of the (German) Women's Liturgical Movement, Berger gives important markers and guidelines in this regard. These insights are desperately needed in the South African ecclesial society.