

# Emerging Critical Resources for Liturgical Studies

**Convener:** Bruce T. Morrill (*Theology Department, Boston College*)

**Seminar participants:** Kimberly Hope Belcher, Thomas Burke, Andrea Bieler, Sharon Fennema, Christopher Grundy, Dirk Lange, Bruce Morrill

**Visitors:** Benjamin Anthony, Kari Veiteberg

**Brief description of the work:** Seminar members read two books by Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990, 1999) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993). Three papers, followed by responses by Thomas Burke and Bruce Morrill, led into open discussions.

In “Worship and the Theological Performance of Eschatological Identity: Preliminary Theses Regarding the Methodological Insights from Judith Butler for Liturgical Theology,” Sharon Fennema argued for a correlation between Butler’s theory of the performative constitution of gender identity and recent liturgical theologians’ claims about the repeated practice of liturgy (or *ordo*) as formative of Christian identity. The details of Butler’s theory offer corrective evaluation and further critical insight into the rather rigid normative claims of such liturgical theologies. The process by which Christian identity occurs is an embodying of norms, a citation of authoritative practices. It is through the repeated or reiterative performance of Christian identity (which cites the normative or regulatory regimes of both culture and Christian practice) that it acquires its coherence and sense of materiality. Butler’s articulation of the dynamic relations between fictively binary categories of identity affords possibilities for recognizing ways in which liturgical repetitions succumb to failures in and, thus, disruptions to the normative patterns. It can also open into a methodological apparatus for deconstructing the polarities of conventional Christian eschatology so as to argue for how liturgical practices can perform

the interrelationship of the present and future of God’s love. Finally, Butler’s concept of parody as a strategy of disruption offers liturgical theology a model for theologizing the disruptive potential of repetitive performance.

The second presentation was Dirk Lange’s “Disseminated Identities: Baptism and the Self,” in which he mined the resources of another of Butler’s texts, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005). In a religious culture of personal salvation, Butler’s writing destabilizes commonly held (theological) assumptions about the self: Not only can the “I” not know its beginnings, it cannot even find an appropriate structure—outside of narration—to rhetorically state this beginning, nor can it control the way in which its narration is heard by the other. This failure of the “I” to account for itself, however, does not deconstruct the possibility of ethics but, rather, provides for it anew. Truth is not the object of self-sufficient reflection but a relational performance wherein subjects give accounts of themselves to one another, with the willingness to risk such relations constituting the opportunity to become human. The implication for baptism is that the ritual enacts the truth that the self cannot form itself but, rather, must continuously perform rhetorical narrations implicating the self and the other. No mere figurative gesture, the real immersion of a real body in baptism implicates the “I” in a body, the body of the Other, a communion (of saints) in Christ’s suffering as known in the suffering of the neighbor (see Matt 25). The Holy Spirit continually works to conform my “self” to the other. “I” cannot do that work. Only the totally Other can.

Andrea Bieler likewise argued that baptism shapes a performative space for a Christian identity that is not exclusively directed towards an imagined inner, essential self but, rather, is outwardly, interactively oriented in communal contexts. In “A Susceptible Practice: Performing Baptismal Identity” (the draft of a contribution to a forthcoming book), Bieler tapped the efforts of such theologians as Elizabeth Stuart and Gerard Loughlin to interpret aspects of Christian traditions through queer theories so as then to propose her own queer reading of baptism through a study of early Christian sources. Further echoing both Lange’s and Fennema’s presentations, Bieler summarized the ritual gestures of baptism as de-centering the self for a lifelong process of performing an identity that is eccentric, communal, and eschatological. She then turned to such texts as the *Apostolic Tradition* and the fourth-century mystagogical catecheses to propose queer interpretations of ritual gestures, as well as the ancient pastors’ explanations, highlighting the extent to which practices wherein bodies become sites of divine presence, Spirit in flesh, are gendered and evocative of sexual and religious desires. Fasting, anointing, immersion in water, kissing, nakedness, loosening of hair (for women), undressing

and dressing—all of these bodily acts immerse the Christian in a fluid life-space wherein the hegemonic social forces in the late Roman Empire (e.g. power over slaves, women, etc.) mix with redemptive eschatological claims instantiated in ritualized bodies called together to share in messianic identities, members of Christ's Body, anointed ones.

## Environment and Art

**Convener:** Martin V. Rambusch (*chairman, Rambusch Decorating Company*)

**Brief description of work:** The Environment and Art Seminar continues to reconsider and refine their objectives during the yearly gathering in January. Following our agenda of 2010, we tried to balance personal experiences of significant importance with scholarly presentations. One modification to our meetings this year was that one day was set aside for presentations and discussions, and one day was allowed for coordinated tours.

Presentations were made on two books that were then used as mutual points of reference as the buildings on the tour were experienced and then discussed. These books were *Seeing the Sacred in Contemporary Religious Architecture* by Douglas R. Hoffman, reviewed and digested to the Seminar by Reverend Philip Horrigan, as well as *Sacred Power, Sacred Space* by Jeane Halgren Kilde, reviewed and digested by Timothy Parker.

A draft presentation for next year was submitted to the Seminar for commentary by Rev. David Caron, O.P. The thesis is concerned with creating a system for taking the four movements/principles of *lectio divina* that deal with a printed text (Scripture) and applying them, not to a text, but to sacred or liturgical art. This would allow for a fifth movement/principle. The thesis was of interest to the group and Caron will endeavor to expand on this idea and he hopes to have a submission for the group next year in Montreal.

Our onsite visits included Congregation Beth Shalom in San Francisco, the Cathedral of Light in Oakland, and Saint Gregory of Nyssa in San Francisco. At each site the members of the group were encouraged to explore and experience the space on their own. Then a tour was given explaining how the building(s) came about, what impacted its building, and what actions take place within the building. Sometimes these actions evolved, at times within the constrictions of the building and, in other cases, by forcing the space to conform to the action. As we traveled from location to location, a dialogue took place in which we referenced the books the group read, often starting with the presenters regarding how their authors would have responded to the space, the actions within the space, etc. This led to a variety of discussions that were insightful and