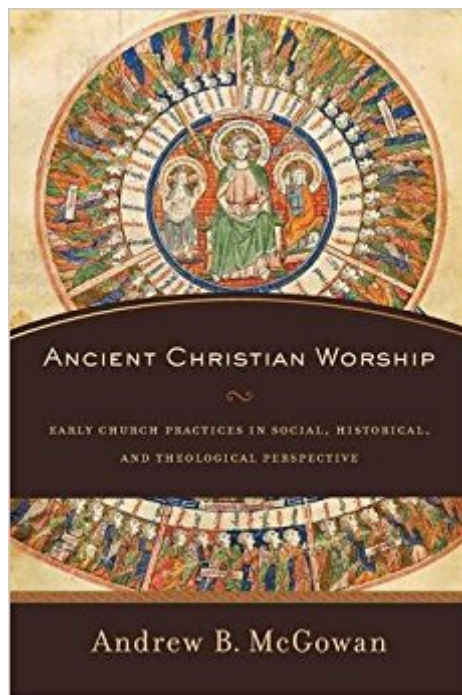


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Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices In Social, Historical, And Theological Perspective



Synopsis

An Important Study on the Worship of the Early Church This introduction to the origins of Christian worship illuminates the importance of ancient liturgical patterns for contemporary Christian practice. Andrew McGowan takes a fresh approach to understanding how Christians came to worship in the distinctive forms still familiar today. Deftly and expertly processing the bewildering complexity of the ancient sources into lucid, fluent exposition, he sets aside common misperceptions to explore the roots of Christian ritual practices--including the Eucharist, baptism, communal prayer, preaching, Scripture reading, and music--in their earliest recoverable settings. Now in paper.

Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Baker Academic; Reprint edition (January 5, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0801097878

ISBN-13: 978-0801097874

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 15 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #201,300 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #158 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Worship & Devotion > Rites & Ceremonies](#) #171 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Church Institutions & Organizations](#) #1206 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Church History](#)

Customer Reviews

"One of our best liturgical historians has written the book we hoped he would. In readable and engaging prose, *Ancient Christian Worship* draws together a quarter century of recent scholarship on the origins of Christian worship. It will soon be required reading for anyone interested in the critical study of the ancient Christian church, including students and scholars of the New Testament and Late Antiquity."--Charles A. Bobertz, St. John's University

The proliferation of detailed studies of ancient Christian worship leaves nonspecialists in want of a reliable and well-researched survey. Andrew McGowan comes to our aid in this splendid volume. Informed by an expert knowledge of the field and a keen methodological awareness, yet writing with a clarity that renders the work accessible to any educated reader, McGowan surveys the early Christians' communal eating and drinking, teaching and preaching, song and dance, initiation and prayer, and feasts and fasts. He

gives due attention to the diversity attested in the first four centuries but also recognizes commonalities discernible in the sources. When students inquire about early Christian worship, this will now be the book I recommend as the starting point for serious research."--Jeffrey Peterson, Austin Graduate School of Theology

"Ancient Christian Worship is a wonderfully broad but deep introduction to the sources and complex history of early Christian liturgical traditions. Readers will find here not only an astute interpretation of the backgrounds and foregrounds of early liturgy but also a vivid demonstration of what the various components of early worship services actually looked and sounded like. Here indeed is a treasury of insights into the formative theology of worship."--Paul Blowers, Emmanuel Christian Seminary

"Consistently learned and insightful, Andrew McGowan offers a comprehensive introduction to the worship life of early Christians. He covers an impressive range of primary materials and deftly sifts through the scholarly debates surrounding them, preparing an easily accessible feast for anyone interested in the origins and multifold forms of early Christian liturgical practice."--Harold W. Attridge, Yale Divinity School

"This is the book that I wish I had written, but Andrew McGowan has done it so much better. Easily accessible to a nonspecialist reader, it nevertheless contains the fruit of the most up-to-date academic scholarship. Anyone wanting a reliable and comprehensive introduction to the practices of the early Christians must start here."--Paul Bradshaw, University of Notre Dame

"Ancient Christian Worship is the book that scholars, teachers, and students of early Christianity and liturgical history have long needed. Andrew McGowan provides an authoritative, accessible, and up-to-date synthesis of what we know (and do not know) about the worship lives of the ancient Christians. Anyone interested in the early church or Christian liturgy will learn from this gracefully written and clearly argued book."--David Brakke, Ohio State University

"Andrew McGowan provides a clear and beautifully written introduction to ancient Christian worship. All readers, from beginners to those more advanced, will be rewarded by both his erudition and his insight. This work justifiably will be cherished by students and teachers alike for generations to come."--Robin Jensen, Vanderbilt University; author of *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*

"Ancient Christian Worship provides pastors, students, and interested readers with a lively, detailed account of how Christians ate together, prayed, read Scripture, and celebrated with song and dance from New Testament times to the fourth-century basilica churches. The story of diversity and change will encourage twenty-first-century believers struggling with church renewal."--Pheme Perkins, Boston College

"Essential for the study of early Christianity."--Larry Hurtado, blog (larryhurtado.wordpress.com)

"McGowan's book will remain a most valuable companion for the

study of early Christian liturgy for a long time to come."--John F. Baldovin, SJ, Theological Studies

Very good history of how Christian worship developed today. Also the book illustrates how pious Christians developed different views concerning various subjects. A very good study

Excellent resource on early Christian worship.

Great book. Well researched.

This text provides a researched overview of the development of ancient christian worship. Some of the information gleaned from ancient writers alive during that period shows how difficult and messy was the transition to Christianity if that is what a person chose. "The Journal of Early Christian Studies", a quarterly academic journal, provides a treasury of current studies about early Christian life and belief if one wishes to make further inquiry.

A+. Great experience.

There are few times in history so important and yet so obscure as the years following the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, when the movement bearing his name transformed from a band of several dozen followers hiding in terror into an international community that would shape the subsequent history of the world. Despite the paucity of evidence from this period, historians and theologians alike continually return to the earliest years of the Jesus Movement, attempting to ascertain precisely who was doing what and how they were doing it. To help bring clarity to the all important aspect of Christian worship from this period comes Andrew B.

McGowan's masterful *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014). In *Ancient Christian Worship*, McGowan takes a survey approach to the topic of Christian worship praxis and theology during the first four centuries of the Christian era. Taking a contextual approach, McGowan delves deeply into social, historical, and theological factors influencing the early Church. The special attention paid to the contexts of Second Temple Judaism, Greco-Roman culture, and "book practice" (including both reading and writing) of the period makes this work a treasure trove of insights into the worship of early Christians. Of course, from the start McGowan helpfully notes that what we (post)moderns call

“worship” did not exactly exist during the first centuries of Christianity. He argues, rather, that distinctly Christian worship developed out of multiple contexts, impulses, traditions, and sources during this period, helping to create the tapestry of historical Christianity which influences contemporary expressions of Christian worship. To show us the tapestry of ancient Christian worship, McGowan considers the formation and development of meal, word, music, initiation, prayer, and time. Considering each topic chronologically, McGowan constructively outlines the origins of various Christian practices and theological positions, correcting common presuppositions about the origins of certain practices and tracing their development through documentary and archaeological evidence. He takes a basically chronological approach to the presentation of this evidence, though he occasionally supplements this tact with periscopes into specific geographic locales, important early Christians, or formative theological debates. As helpful as McGowan’s interaction with secondary literature concerning early Christianity and worship practices might be, it pales in comparison to the usefulness of his engagement of primary source materials. Although his treatment of sources is far from exhausting (for how could it be?), he clearly highlights the most important sources and persons for each respective topic. His inclusion of sources from Syrian Christianity was especially welcome, especially his forays into the liturgical poetry of Ephrem the Syrian. Though McGowan spends ample time on each subject he considers, the attention he gives to his Meal and Word sections designates them as particularly important for his engagement with early Christianity. Throughout his examination of the Eucharist, meal practice, the formation of the Christian scriptures, and Christian exegesis (in both sermons and commentaries), McGowan highlights the diversity of perspectives in the early faith and underlines the important ways in which even divergent views centered around central claims concerning the Risen Lord Jesus. For example, in the Meal chapter on the Eucharist, McGowan notes several different bases for Eucharistic theology, but also emphasizes aspects of real presence theology, ritual, and the message and meaning of Jesus that were present in all the forms of Christian Eucharistic practice. Accordingly, an important component of McGowan’s argument concerns the lived reality of Christian experience that was centered around the Eucharist and the Word (and initiated by baptism). This comes across even in the chapters on Music (Song and Dance), Initiation (Baptism, Anointing, and Foot Washing), Prayer (Hours, Ways, and Texts), and Time (Feasts and Fasts), where the centrality of Christ and the words of God enlivened and gave meaning to the development of these Christian practices. Ancient Christian Worship is especially text focused – relying heavily upon the Christian New Testament, Jewish writings, Apostolic Fathers, Church orders, and other early Christian

writings. I thought not at the exclusion of other sources, for McGowan incorporates the insights of archaeology and general history into his presentation. This work finds an excellent balance between “what we want to find” and “what we actually know,” for McGowan is careful to not overstate or over interpret the evidence available to us. This makes *Ancient Christian Worship* an integral resource and introduction to Christianity during this period, for McGowan comes across as less interested in pushing a thesis (though, of course, he has one) than providing readers with an overview of the sources available and allowing others to craft their own theories of development. If there is any critique of this work, it would be McGowan’s unwillingness to take a position (any position) on certain issues, though this is entirely problematic overall. Additionally vexing is McGowan’s occasional avoidance of Christocentric language, as if we cannot call early Christians those who gave total allegiance to Jesus as the Christ. Overall, this text more than accomplishes its goal of presenting a contextualized picture of ancient Christian worship and, indeed, it raises the standard for all future works touching on this aspect of the early Church. I would not be surprised if *Ancient Christian Worship* succeeds Paul Bradshaw’s *Early Christian Worship* as the introduction to how early Christians approached their worship. In fact, I rather expect it, as McGowan superbly introduces the first centuries of Christian worship and does so in a relatively comprehensive and easy-to-engage manner. *Ancient Christian Worship* thus comes highly recommended anyone studying early Christianity or Christian worship, and will be beneficial for anyone wanting an introduction to early Christian faith and practice more broadly. This truly is a masterful work and one that I look forward to engaging for many years to come. I received this book from Baker Academic Press in exchange for my honest review. All opinions expressed are my own. For more reviews like this, please visit www.pursuingveritas.com

I would like to express my thanks to Baker Academic for supplying me with a review copy of this book. Dr. Andrew B. McGowan (Berkeley Divinity School at Yale) *Ancient Christian Worship* is a solid text for individuals interested in learning more about the birth and evolution of Christian worship, liturgy, ritual, and practice. Each chapter and its various subsections are incredibly detailed but extremely focused and are broken up thus: Introduction: The Origins of Christian Worship Meal: Banquet and Eucharist Word: Reading and Preaching Music: Song and Dance Initiation: Baptism, Anointing, and Foot Washing Prayer: Hours, Ways, and Texts Time: Feasts and Fasts Epilogue: The Making of Christian Worship McGowan’s work begins by exploring the complexities and problems in attempting to reconstruct an image or idea of Christian

worship from the early centuries, due to the lack of sources and detailed references in the sources we do have. Of primary interest to McGowan is the Apostle Paul's 1 Letter to the Corinthians, the Didache, and writings from the Apostolic Fathers and other Patristic sources. Given the manner in which most of these texts talk about worship and ritual, it is actually a lot easier to reconstruct what the proto-orthodox did do, something McGowan has no trouble pointing out to readers. However these critical references and condemnations are noteworthy as it does help establish the diversity of opinions and attitudes associated with the issues of worship, prayer, teaching, and preaching, etc. Something that I did find slightly disappointing was that McGowan focused mainly on trying to reconstruct the practices of the proto-orthodox church and did not go in any great amount of detail about the ideas and practices of worship as found within heretical groups like the Gnostics, the Marcionites, and the Valentinians. Regardless, given its accessible writing style and focused sections, *Ancient Christian Worship* is an ideal introduction to the subject matter. From the very beginning and throughout the book, McGowan warns readers of hasty connections between the sacramental and practical debates of the ancient church to that of the modern church. One of the strengths for students and laypeople of *Ancient Christian Worship* is highlighting the significance of development Christian worship within the matrix of the ancient world. For example, the role of bread and wine in everyday Mediterranean life and the common diet, the background of philosophical thought about the stomach and the soul, and the concept of prayer to the ancient Jewish and Pagan mind. Another noteworthy testament to McGowan's work is its emphasis on diversity as dictated by cultural and geographical differences in their attitudes and practices, such as Rome as compared to North Africa on what time and where the body of Christ should be consumed. What will be undoubtedly particularly interesting reading for the modern reader is what features and practices have been removed or lost from modern day practice and which ones have stood the test of time. Written with indescribable detail and accessible writing style, *Ancient Christian Worship* provides an amazing amount of information for readers. From prayer to the reading Christian scripture, from dancing to the Lord's supper; the scope is simply amazing but each is given ample attention. Readers will be left with a well grounded and wide range of perspectives about the rich complexities of early Christian worship, practice, ritual, and liturgy. McGowan's work is a fine example of scholarship that will assist scholars, students, and laypeople in the study of early Christian worship and practice for years to come.

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