

Andrew B. McGowan. *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014. 320 pages. \$25.06.

Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective, by Andrew B. McGowan, provides a scholarly survey of the origins and multiple narratives of ancient Christian worship practices from New Testament times through the fourth century (16–17). This text is designed for teachers, seminarians, pastors, church leaders, and readers interested in the practices of Christian worship among the earliest Christian communities.

McGowan asserts that within the New Testament there is no worship practice pattern that can be regarded as univocally normative. The more one digs into the primary sources, the deeper one finds diversity rather than uniformity. From their very origins, Christian liturgical practices reflect a considerable variety of narratives, creativity, and multiplicity, as a result of differing theological and biblical interpretations and in particular, differing social and cultural contexts. From McGowan's research, one draws the conclusion that one cannot really talk of standard patterns of ancient Christian worship practices. To emphasize what is common and to ignore what is distinctive in early Christian worship in the early churches seriously distorts our understanding of the variety of ancient Christian worship practices, and leads to erroneous understandings for the ongoing revision of Christian worship.

McGowan's work also contends that in the early Church, the methods of Christian worship practice were not as important as the worship itself. This book emphasizes not only the diversity of early Christian liturgies. It also points to the overarching commonalities, indicating Christian worship practice itself, as "the set of communal practices of prayer" (1), . . . "as acts of obedience and service [allegiance], and as the [ritual] characteristic habitus of the followers of Jesus" (261). In my view, McGowan's research in *Ancient Christian Worship* articulates that the emergence of Christian liturgy was influenced by the Jewish concept of communal worship and rituals, as well as by Greek/Roman religious rituals in the first four centuries. However, his survey confirms that Christian worship gradually created its particular liturgical sense, principles, and practices on the basis of their sincere faith and participation, even if the earliest Christians did not clearly acknowledge their performances as worship, *per se*.

Examining the above-mentioned evidence in the New Testament texts, Jewish literature, and church orders such as the *Didache*, *Apostolic Traditions*, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, *Apostolic Constitutions*, and *Testamentum Domini*, together with resources of patristic literature such as writings of the apologists, McGowan categorizes the multiple practices of the early Christians, in six ways: 1. Meal (Banquet and Eucharist); 2. Word (Reading and Preaching); 3. Music (Song and Dancing); 4. Initiation (Baptism, Anointing, and Foot Washing); 5. Prayer (Hours, Ways, and Texts); and 6. Time (Feasts and Fasts).

McGowan does not comment on these rituals, perhaps because they had not yet been recognized as sacramental Christian liturgical practices among the earliest Church leaders (261). Yet one can find numerous references among the early Church Fathers to their recommendations on liturgical principles or instructions for the early Christians regarding rites of passage. For example, Tertullian refers to the costly anointing of the Christian dead, and asserted that Christians should not buy incense for use in idolatrous worship of pagan gods. Chrysostom forbade the hiring of professional mourning women, and condemned Christian women for uttering wild cries and tearing their clothes at funerals. Others such as Ignatius of Antioch,

Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine, also mention the significance of marriage. It would have been advantageous for the reader to encounter discussion of these meaningful exchanges as one considers the role of ritual and practices in early Christian life.

Overall, McGowan's book outlines the multilayered quality of ancient Christian worship practices by indicating the diversity as well as particularity interwoven between liturgy and theology amidst various social/cultural contexts and specific historical periods in primitive Christianity. For anyone with interest in the kaleidoscope of historical accounts regarding ancient Christian worship practices, *Ancient Christian Worship* provides the reader with rich commentary. Additionally, for those hoping to prepare seminarians and young scholars with a deep understanding of early liturgical principles, McGowan's interdisciplinary approach functions to help students of the early Church to understand more clearly the contextual, spiritual, and liturgical roots of later sacramental liturgical practices. Finally, McGowan offers the reader an excellent bibliography for further reading on these topics on relevant works published in the new millennium.

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