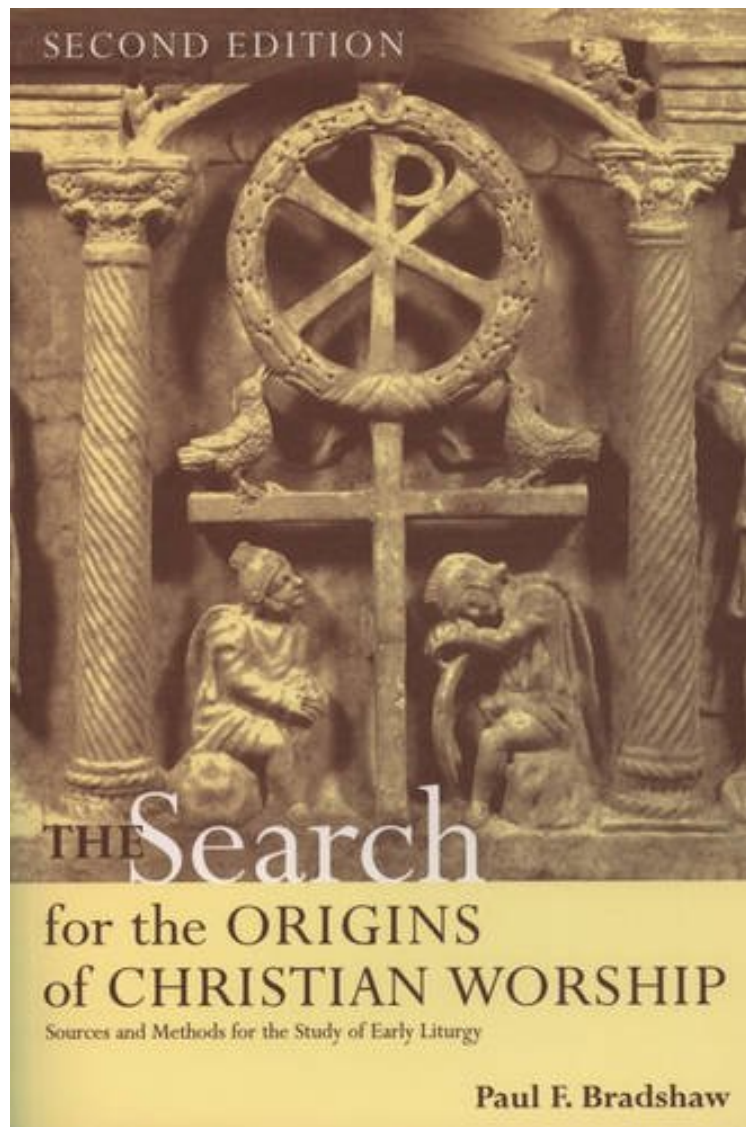


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The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy

Paul F. Bradshaw

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Michael J. Pahls In his *The Early Church: An Annotated Bibliography of Literature in English*, Thomas A. Robinson acknowledges the important contribution of this work by Paul Bradshaw. Even Robinson's high praise of the work's significance seems understated in light of its subsequent reception, however. Originally published in 1992, the second edition has been thoroughly expanded and updated and is now widely recognized as heralding a new age in the study of early Christian liturgy (Be sure to buy the current edition if you buy used). In the preface, Bradshaw borrows the nomenclature of comparative linguistics which distinguishes between "lumpers" (those who group diverse languages into a few families) and "splitters" (those who inspect the resulting lumps and find fault lines). This work represents something like the latter approach as applied to the history of primitive Christian worship. Bradshaw summarizes this perspective in four guiding assumptions: 1) We know far less about the first three centuries of Christian liturgical practice than has been previously thought. 2) What we do know points to considerable diversity rather than a previously assumed uniformity. 3) The "classical shape of the liturgy" is more the result of the fourth century assimilation of different traditions than the perseverance of an original apostolic pattern. 4) The post-Nicene era reflects frequent liturgical compromise and mutation rather than the triumph of one way of doing things (though discrete examples of this are not unknown). To cite one example, in his chapter, "Christian Initiation: A Study in Diversity," Bradshaw brings this methodology to bear on the catechumenate itself. After surveying the evidences from Syria, North Africa, Rome, Gaul and Spain, and Egypt, he concludes that one cannot legitimately speak of a standard or normative pattern of early initiation practice in ante-Nicene Christianity. He also concludes that the traditional distinctions between "Eastern" and "Western" practices is likewise illegitimate. While Bradshaw does admit of evidence for some common features that transcend the diversity of local practice (preparatory prebaptismal instruction, a formal act of renunciation and faith, anointing, immersion, and the imposition of hands), he also argues that these features do not always share a common form or meaning. His conclusion is that "there are just too many variations in structure and theology to allow us to construct a single picture in anything but the very broadest terms" (170). Bradshaw readily acknowledges his debt to the prior work of Georg Kretschmar's "Beitrag zur Geschichte der Liturgie, insbesondere der Tauf liturgie, in gypten" (really the first work to point out the irreducible diversity in the early Christian catechumenate). But Kretschmar's essay suffered for its inability to reach a wide audience. Search for the *Origins of Christian Worship*, on the other hand, has been widely read and cited as defining a new orthodoxy in the field. Prior work on the early Christian liturgy, however important in particular details, is really subject to revision according to the consensus that has gathered in this volume's wake and subsequent work must account for its concerns. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. good book perhaps could be better By Mark M Seeger An academic book I bought for a class I was taking . . . insightful, not too lengthy, not overly boring . . . I kept it. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A very biased book By Customer The author is looking at history from a very preconceived point of view and ignores very much evidence, both internal and external to the scriptures.

This is a substantially expanded and completely revised version of Bradshaw's classic account, first published in 1993. Traditional liturgical scholarship has generally been marked by an attempt to fit together the various pieces of evidence for the practice of early Christian worship in such a way as to suggest that a single, coherent line of evolution can be traced from the apostolic age to the fourth century. Bradshaw examines this methodology in the light of recent developments in Jewish liturgical scholarship, of current trends in New Testament studies, and of the nature of the source-documents themselves, and especially the ancient church orders. In its place he offers a guide to Christian liturgical origins which adopts a much more cautious approach, recognizing the limitations of what can truly be known, and takes seriously the clues pointing to the essentially variegated character of ancient Christian worship.

Praise for the first edition: "An indispensable instrument for liturgical teaching and research."--Worship "Splendid--first rate!"--Edward Foley, Catholic Theological Union "Thank you for this wonderfully informative book. It is so well done and fills such a current need."--Lynn McMillon, Oklahoma State University About the Author Paul F. Bradshaw is at University of Notre Dame.