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0521525594 - A Sociological History of Christian Worship
Martin D. Stringer
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A SOCIOLOGICAL HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

In this book the 2,000-year history of Christian worship is viewed from a sociological perspective. Martin Stringer develops the idea of discourse as a way of understanding the place of Christian worship within its many and diverse social contexts. Beginning with the biblical material the author provides a broad survey of changes over 2,000 years of the Christian church, together with a series of case studies that highlight particular elements of the worship, or specific theoretical applications. Stringer does not simply examine the mainstream traditions of Christian worship in Europe and Byzantium, but also gives space to lesser-known traditions in Armenia, India, Ethiopia and elsewhere. Offering a contribution to the ongoing debate that breaks away from a purely textual or theological study of Christian worship, this book provides a greater understanding of the place of worship in its social and cultural context.

MARTIN D. STRINGER is lecturer in the Sociology and Anthropology of Religion and Head of the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham.

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Preface and acknowledgements

The origins of this book go back to my final year at University in Manchester when I sat through a course on the History of Liturgy delivered by Richard Buxton and Kenneth Stevenson. I remember sitting, even then, thinking that one day I would really love to deliver a course of this kind. My own course, however, would look nothing like that offered by Richard and Kenneth. This is not to say anything against the course itself; I learnt a great deal from it, and it inspired many different thoughts that have ultimately led to this book. I am very grateful for all that they taught me. It was simply that at the time I was taking a degree in Social Anthropology and the approach to liturgy taken by Richard and Kenneth was basically textual. I could see so many possible connections between the work that I was doing in anthropology and the material I was being presented with in the course on liturgy. I was just dying to bring the two together.

Twelve years later, having been appointed as a Lecturer in the Sociology and Anthropology of Religion at Birmingham University, I was invited by the then Head of Department, Frances Young, to offer a course on the History of Liturgy for the B.A. in Theology. This was my chance to bring together all the reading and reflection that I had done in the previous twelve years and to create the kind of course that I wanted to teach. The response of the students was very positive, and I have taught that course a number of times since that first attempt. I have also changed it over time through further reading and in response to the questions and comments from the students themselves. Without the contribution from those students this book would never have been written.

This book, therefore, derives from that course, although in a very indirect way. It is not a textbook as such. It does not aim to bring together all that we need to know about Christian worship or all that should be taught in any course on the subject. In this book I am aiming to present something of the thinking behind the course, the way in which anthropological and sociological ideas and concepts can be applied to the history of Christian worship. In writing the book, however, I have been conscious of aiming at students of liturgy as well as established scholars in the field, and at all those worshippers who are keen to explore their practice further. I have aimed, therefore, to be comprehensive in my scope while focusing on specific situations that I feel could be of interest to the general reader, or that relate to specific elements of the theoretical discussion. I have not tried to enter

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into all the intricacies or sophistication of the theories themselves; this is not a book on social theory. However, I have tried to present as much of the theoretical material as would be necessary to understand its application. I have also tried to focus on recent work in social history and liturgical study rather than going back over older arguments in the discipline. My bibliography, therefore, concentrates primarily on works in English that have been produced in the last thirty years.

In writing this book I have, of course, to recognise my debt of gratitude to Richard Buxton and Kenneth Stevenson, who set me on this road back in Manchester over twenty years ago. I also have to thank many different colleagues in the field of liturgical study and sociology that I have learnt from over the years, especially those who have attended the conferences of the Society for Liturgical Study and the BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group where elements of this work have been presented. I also have to thank my colleagues at Birmingham who have encouraged me in this work and with whom I have had many useful conversations on various aspects of the task. In particular I wish to recognise the support of David Taylor and Christine Alison, who have provided between them many stimulating hours of conversation on the minutiae of situation and theory. I also wish to thank Katharina Brett and the editors and readers of Cambridge University Press who, through careful and thoughtful engagement with the text, have contributed so much to the finished book. Finally, I wish to thank David Salt without whom, it is fair to say, the text would never have been completed. In particular I wish to thank him for his continuing support and for the contribution of his knowledge, expertise and invaluable book collections in the fields of Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopian and Byzantine history. Needless to say, despite the contributions of so many other scholars, all the remaining errors and mistakes in the book are entirely my own.