

Cambridge University Press
 0521525594 - A Sociological History of Christian Worship
 Martin D. Stringer
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

Discourse, devotion and embodiment

HISTORIES OF WORSHIP

For almost as long as we have records of specifically Christian worship there has been a sense of the history of that worship. In his letter to the Corinthians, written twenty to thirty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul talks about what 'I received from the Lord' and 'passed on to you'.¹ This sense of tradition is also central to many of the earliest commentators. The compilers of what were to become known as the 'church orders' in the third and fourth centuries made a feature both of the supposed apostolic origin of these orders and of their collecting together of elements of the tradition.² 'Tradition' dominated Christian thinking on the history of worship for much of the first fifteen hundred years, with the explicit assumption that all Christians continued the practices instituted by Jesus and his Apostles. Beginning in the seventeenth century, however, new ideas began to develop and the understanding of a 'history' of Christian worship began to take root.

With printing and the development of scholarship Benedictine monks such as J. Mabillon (1632–1707) and E. Martène (1654–1739) began to collect together, and print, the various manuscripts relating to their own specific 'tradition'.³ It was in studying these manuscripts, noting their differences and developments, and in tracing these through time that the origins of 'liturgical' study can be seen. The study of the 'liturgy', that is of the texts of Christian worship, continued to develop over the centuries. At

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:23. All quotations are taken from the New International Version.

² P. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship, Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*. London: SPCK, 2002, 73–97.

³ Mabillon's *De Liturgica Gallicana Libri Tres* was first published in Paris in 1685 and Martène's *De Antiquis Ecclesiae Ritibus* was published in Rouen in 1700–2. E. Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books from the Beginning to the Thirteenth Century*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998, 7–8.

Cambridge University Press

0521525594 - A Sociological History of Christian Worship

Martin D. Stringer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

first things developed relatively slowly with an emphasis on the collection and publication of texts. However, with the development of historiography in the nineteenth century, the collection and cataloguing of texts was transformed into the 'science of liturgiology'.⁴ Drawing on contemporary scholarly models of comparative linguistics, texts were compared and laws developed that were seen to determine the development of liturgical practice. The earliest attempts simply set out principles for the dating and comparisons of texts, such as William Palmer's *Origines Liturgicae*.⁵ Later work tried to develop principles that could place any prayer into a family type or historical period based on its language and style.⁶ Towards the end of the century this came together in Anton Baumstark's classic work on *Comparative Liturgy* that still stands today as one of the very few works of theory as applied to liturgical history.⁷

At the same time a more narrative approach to the history of Christian worship was also developing, reaching its classic form in L. Duchesne's *Christian Worship*.⁸ These two traditions, the theoretical and the narrative, combined in what have become the definitive volumes in the study of Christian worship, Gregory Dix's *Shape of the Liturgy*, and Joseph Jungmann's *Missarum Sollemnia*.⁹ In the *Shape*, Dix presents a narrative account of the history of the eucharist, concentrating particularly on the first four centuries (with subsequent chapters on medieval developments and the English Reformation), while also applying a structuralist style of analysis that leads him to define a common shape for all eucharistic liturgies across time and space.¹⁰ Jungmann focuses specifically on the Western, Catholic tradition and begins with a narrative account of the development of the rite. This is followed by a detailed exploration of each element of the mass, producing what might be called an 'archaeological'

⁴ J. M. Neale, *Essays on Liturgiology and Church History*. London: Saunders, Otley & Co., 1863.

⁵ W. Palmer, *Origines Liturgicae, or Antiquities of the English Ritual, and A Dissertation on Primitive Liturgies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1832. See M. D. Stringer, 'Antiquities of an English Liturgist: William Palmer's Use of Origins in the Study of the English Liturgy', *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, 108 (1994), 146–56.

⁶ M. D. Stringer, 'Style against Structure: The Legacy of John Mason Neale for Liturgical Scholarship' *Studia Liturgica*, 27:2 (1997), 235–45.

⁷ A. Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy*. London: Mowbray, 1958.

⁸ L. Duchesne, *Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution, A Study of the Latin Liturgy up to the Time of Charlemagne*. London: SPCK, 1904.

⁹ G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1945, and J. A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite, Its Origins and Development (Missarum Sollemnia)*. New York, Benziger Brothers, 1959.

¹⁰ Dix's 'shape' is more closely related to the early structuralism of Arnold Van Gennep's work on *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960) than the later structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss and his colleagues.

Introduction

3

approach to liturgical history.¹¹ Structuralism and other theoretical traditions have been applied to liturgical history through the remaining years of the twentieth century but never in such a systematic fashion.¹²

Throughout this tradition of historical writings a number of principles became established as defining features of all 'liturgical' history. These were determined largely by the kind of data that the authors had to work with. The first principle was inherited from the earliest pioneers and has been retained to the present day. This is an emphasis on texts. The most complete evidence that we have from the past exists in the form of texts. These texts have been collected over the centuries, edited, published and made available to scholars, and, while they raised many interesting questions about dating and interpretation, it is easy to assume that the texts are all that we possess. It is only in recent years, with the growth of social history and the application of other kinds of evidence, that the idea of a history of liturgical practice or of personal responses to worship, rather than liturgical texts, has become possible.¹³ This is not to deny the value of textual analysis. Great strides have been made in the understanding of texts, and without this work the broader project of a history of practice or responses would have been all but impossible. However, it is still the case that the analysis of texts and the tracing of elements of rite through the texts remains one of the principal tasks of those who call themselves 'liturgists'. It is for this reason that I have titled this work a history of 'Christian worship', and for the most part avoided the word 'liturgy' in what follows. I am by training an anthropologist with an interest in the practice of worship, not a textual scholar interested in the minutiae of words and phrases.

The other consequence of the particular historical tradition associated with the study of 'liturgy' is also related to the textual nature of the analysis, and concerns the time frame covered by the histories that have been written. The Benedictine origins of liturgical scholarship have been

¹¹ By 'archaeological' I refer to the process of discovering the origins, or even pre-history, of various elements of the rite in the different strata of the textual record. See M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1972.

¹² See R. Taft, 'The Structural Analysis of Liturgical Units: An Essay in Methodology', in R. Taft (ed.), *Beyond East and West, Problems in Liturgical Understanding*. Washington: Pastoral Press, 1984, 151–66.

¹³ Although even in a detailed and comprehensive work of social history as applied to Christian worship, such as Miri Rubin's *Corpus Christi, The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) or Susan White's *A History of Women in Christian Worship* (London: SPCK, 2003), the emphasis is still primarily on texts, albeit a very wide range of texts, and the ideas they express.

developed in mainland Europe, and have led to a great tradition of scholarship on medieval liturgy exploring and elucidating the amazing diversity, variety and intricacy of the medieval traditions of Western Europe. This tradition is best summarised in Cyrille Vogel's great work on the sources of medieval liturgy.¹⁴ Another tradition is seen more clearly in Dix's book on the *Shape of the Liturgy*.¹⁵ This focuses on the first four centuries and then jumps through to the Reformation and ends with a few relevant comments about the present day. For almost as long as scholars have been working on the history of Christian worship, one of the principal concerns has been the question of origins.¹⁶ Many scholars, even up to the end of the nineteenth century, assumed that we could get back to the very words that Jesus, or at least his immediate disciples, used. Others, recognising the incredible diversity of texts within the earliest traditions, began to look for other kinds of origin. Dix reconstructed the 'origin' of Christian worship as a structure or 'shape' rather than a text. Others have looked to the Jewish traditions to try and identify sources for a different kind of origin.¹⁷ Increasingly, today, scholars recognise that to talk of a single 'origin' does not equate with the data that we have.¹⁸ However, even in the most recent studies there is still a tendency to place undue weight on the first few centuries of liturgical history at the expense of the following sixteen.

Whether the liturgical history is written from the tradition of medieval scholarship or from that focused on origins, and the first four centuries, even if it is written from the perspective of the Reformation churches,¹⁹ there has been an almost universal neglect of the period from the end of the sixteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century when, in textual terms, very little is thought to have happened.²⁰ Linked with this has been an emphasis, seen most clearly in Jungmann's work,²¹ on the Western tradition, whether that of Latin Christianity or, more recently, the Reformation churches that grew out of this tradition. An increasing number of scholars have been working on the Eastern tradition, particularly that of the Byzantine Rite (which again for obvious textual reasons concentrates on early and medieval

¹⁴ C. Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy, An Introduction to the Sources*. Washington: The Pastoral Press, 1986.

¹⁵ Dix, *The Shape*. ¹⁶ See Bradshaw, *Search*, for a recent review of this tradition.

¹⁷ See pp. 32–41 below for a wider discussion of this body of work. ¹⁸ Bradshaw, *Search*, 20.

¹⁹ See, for example, G. S. Wakefield, *An Outline of Christian Worship*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998 or J. F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

²⁰ There are a few notable exceptions to this, including Kenneth Stevenson's *Covenant of Grace Renewed, A Vision of the Eucharist in the Seventeenth Century*. London: DLT, 1994.

²¹ Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia*.

Cambridge University Press

0521525594 - A Sociological History of Christian Worship

Martin D. Stringer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

5

traditions).²² A few notable scholars have also worked on other Eastern traditions, but often as examples of obscure, exotic and interesting variations on the Latin or Byzantine traditions, rather than with any wish to explore how these traditions were used in and of themselves.²³

All of this leaves us with a very partial view of the history of Christian worship. It is a view that is dominated by an understanding of the texts rather than that of practice. It is a view that is focused on certain times and places at the expense of others. Finally it is a view that is often written from within the tradition itself, for purposes that are closely related to the needs of the church. Walter Frere's classic work on the *Anaphora*, for example, in which he outlines the early history of the Eucharistic Prayer, is written specifically to rebut those who questioned his ideas about liturgical revision in England in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁴ Much of the history of Christian worship has been written with half an eye on the needs of the revisers and renewers of contemporary worship. Practically all the rest has been written by those with a theological as well as a historical interest. Alongside the textual emphasis in the liturgical tradition, therefore, there has been a constant theological emphasis. This is not surprising, or necessarily a problem. Theology and worship are intimately connected and it would be impossible to discuss one without exploring the other, as many contemporary theologians are discovering.²⁵ To tell the story, however, with a pre-determined theological perspective may not be helpful to the wider development of scholarship. We must also recognise that there are other ways of telling the story that can, within reason, put the theological to one side. This is the approach that I intend to take in this particular text.

Recent histories of Christian worship, therefore, tend to fall into three types. There have in the last twenty years of the twentieth century been a series of excellent studies of specific forms of Christian worship. Kenneth Stevenson's work on marriage,²⁶ or Robert Taft's work on the Office²⁷ are good examples of histories that focus on one specific rite.

²² See R. F. Taft, *The Byzantine Rite, A Short History*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992 and H. Wybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy: The Development of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989.

²³ A recent exception to this is the work of Gabriele Winkler on Armenian and other Eastern rites. See the essays in G. Winkler, *Studies in Early Christian Liturgy and Its Context*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997.

²⁴ W. H. Frere, *The Anaphora or Great Eucharistic Prayer, An Eirenic Study in Liturgical History*. London: SPCK, 1938.

²⁵ See, for example, A. Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*. New York: Pueblo, 1984 and C. Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

²⁶ K. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing, A Study of Christian Marriage Rites*. London: SPCK, 1982.

²⁷ R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West, The Origins of the Divine Office and its Meaning for Today*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986.

Cambridge University Press

0521525594 - A Sociological History of Christian Worship

Martin D. Stringer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Graham Woolfenden's work on early Spanish worship is just one of the latest in a long line of specific historical and regional studies.²⁸ A second type of history is being written primarily by historians in the social or 'cultural' history tradition. These writers have aimed to explore personal narratives, court records or other texts that focus on real people, to explore the way in which individuals at different times and places have responded to worship. Susan White's *History of Women in Christian Worship* is an excellent example of this kind of writing and quotes many similar texts that focus on more specific times and places.²⁹ The final type of history that is common today is that which is aimed at the student, either those studying the tradition as part of a wider study of Christian history,³⁰ or those who are training for ministry in the church. These studies tend to be partial and, as James White's title illustrates, are in practice only *Brief Histor[ies] of Christian Worship*.³¹

This text probably falls into the final type. It would be impossible for me to draw on all the work that has been written about every single element of Christian worship and to combine this into a single volume, or even into many volumes. Every history has to make choices and to set limitations. This, therefore, is inevitably a 'brief history'. However, as I hope I have already suggested, it is a brief history with a specific agenda. It is not a history of texts. It is not a history of theologies. It is not a history of personal responses to worship. It is a history written by a social scientist with an interest in the practice of worship. It therefore both draws on, and in many ways distinguishes itself from, many of the traditions of liturgical history that I have just outlined.

CULTURE, RELIGION AND DISCOURSE

If I am not going to construct my history in terms of texts or theologies then I need to find an alternative organising principle, something that I can say that this is a history of. For an anthropologist one obvious alternative may be 'culture', a history of Christian worship in its cultural context, or perhaps a cultural history of Christian worship. This would certainly be a

²⁸ G. Woolfenden, *Daily Prayer in Christian Spain, A Study of the Mozarabic Office*. London: SPCK, 2000.

²⁹ S.J. White, *Women*.

³⁰ See, for example, J. Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century, A Historical Introduction and Guide for Students and Musicians*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

³¹ White, *Brief History*.

Cambridge University Press

0521525594 - A Sociological History of Christian Worship

Martin D. Stringer

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

7

possibility, and to some extent what follows could be described in both these ways. However, I remain very uneasy about the concept of 'culture'. As used by anthropologists, culture developed as a way of describing and analysing contemporary societies. It is therefore a synchronic rather than a diachronic concept, it captures a snapshot of society rather than providing a dynamic, changing picture.³² Certainly Edward Tylor, in his famous definition of 'culture', uses the term to discuss evolutionary history.³³ However, the discipline moved on from this, rejected evolution and began to use the term synchronically. In later anthropological writings we see the possibility of the world being divided into a mosaic of self-contained and unique cultures, each one of which needed to be investigated and described by an anthropologist.³⁴ Later writing still has challenged the essentially static nature of this model and talks in terms of the dynamics of culture, both across time and in terms of the boundaries between cultures.³⁵ However, for all this, there is still, associated with the word itself, a sense of 'culture' as something all-encompassing, essentially coherent and fundamentally static.³⁶ This does not help us, I would suggest, to engage in a historical account of Christian worship over two thousand years.

At the very least we need to ask whether we can talk in any meaningful sense about a single 'Christian culture' that can cover such a span of time. If not, then we need to explore Christian cultures, or perhaps the presence of Christianity with other, perhaps pagan or humanist 'cultures'. Where does one 'culture' finish and another begin? At which point does the late Roman culture of Gaul become the early medieval culture of France? What about the possibility that in any one region we can talk about layers of culture; an aristocratic culture alongside a popular or peasant culture, or perhaps an urban culture contrasted with a rural culture? Questions may also be raised about the existence of 'subcultures'. Was Christianity a distinct 'subculture' within first-century Corinth, or in thirteenth-century Kerala? More importantly, what would it actually mean to suggest that it was, and what impact would that have on the understanding of worship? Finally, at

³² See for example Roy Wagner's discussion in *The Invention of Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

³³ E. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom*. London: John Murray, 1871, I, I.

³⁴ J. Beattie, *Other Cultures: Aims, Methods and Achievements in Social Anthropology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964, 22.

³⁵ A. Rosman and P. G. Rubel, *The Tapestry of Culture: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995.

³⁶ See Tim Ingold's *Evolution and Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986 for a wider discussion of these trends.

Cambridge University Press

0521525594 - A Sociological History of Christian Worship

Martin D. Stringer

Excerpt

[More information](#)

what point in the third or fourth century does Christianity cease to be a 'subculture' and then become the 'culture' of the later Roman Empire?

'Culture' has also been claimed as a term by disciplines outside of anthropology, particularly those that trace their roots back to 'cultural studies'. In this context the understanding of culture is far less static than the traditional anthropological use of the term. However, it is very difficult to define exactly what it is that these disciplines actually mean by 'culture'. In part the term is used to refer to 'popular culture', the product of the ordinary people of a society, rather than the art, music and literature of the elite. This expectation goes back to the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the University of Birmingham where this use of the term was first publicised.³⁷ In a similar way 'material culture', as used by many historians and archaeologists, also refers more to the everyday objects of a society rather than the grand, defining set pieces. In these terms, much of my own approach in this book is 'cultural'. I am trying to get beyond the textual and the elite understandings of worship to take account of everyday behaviour, the use of space, material artefacts and the practices of ordinary people. In another sense, however, I am not perhaps going as far as many 'cultural historians'.

I am not, for example, going to be giving as much space to the domestic or private context of worship as I could have done. As such I am conscious of missing out on much of what is currently being uncovered about women's understanding of and roles within worship, despite the exciting nature of this work.³⁸ This book deliberately offers a study of the social, or public, practice of worship and the impact that Christian worship has had on societies as a whole. It must always be recognised, however, that the boundaries between the public and the private, the domestic and the social, are always porous and constantly shifting over time, even to the extent that some authors deny such a boundary exists at all in some periods of Christian history.³⁹ I simply do not have the space in this book to cover everything, and that perhaps is my main concern with the concept of 'culture'; it has come to suggest that it does cover everything with no real discrimination between what is cultural and what is not. I have chosen, therefore, to use the word 'sociological' in the title of the book in a

³⁷ S. Hall, 'Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems', in S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis (eds.), *Culture, Media, Language*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1980, 15–47.

³⁸ See White, *Women*, and T. Berger, *Women's Ways of Worship, Gender Analysis and Liturgical History*. Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1999.

³⁹ White, *Women*, 201–5.

Introduction

9

deliberate attempt to narrow my own focus. This is particularly true in relation to the wider possibilities of the so-called 'cultural'.

As an anthropologist, therefore, I find the concept of 'culture' far too vague and much too slippery for the kind of purposes that I am trying to engage with in this text. Perhaps equally problematic is the relationship between 'culture' and 'religion'. Religion, like culture, is a wide, catch-all kind of concept that is almost impossible to define. Like culture it also carries associations of continuity and coherence that make it difficult to use in a historical context. Any author writing on the history of religion in a specific period of time has to hedge their discussion round with so many qualifications that it becomes difficult to see exactly what they may mean by 'religion' in that specific context.⁴⁰ Effectively, religion is one of those terms whose meaning we assume that we know and which we can apply to any particular context, but when we come to try to define it, in anything but a very specific sense, it begins to elude our grasp.⁴¹ There will always be elements of religion that are considered to be 'on the edge': superstition perhaps, or even magic. There will always be questions about the relationship between 'religion' and other spheres of life such as 'economics' or 'politics'; a discussion of one can never fully avoid a discussion of the others. In most societies, certainly those unaffected by the modern separation of religion from other aspects of society, religion cannot easily be distinguished as one thing among many and studied as a separate entity. If we then turn the discussion to focus on the perspective of the individual, rather than the global perspective of society, we can see individuals describing religion more as a 'way of life' encompassing everything that they do, rather than a series of distinct activities or ideas confined to a time or place of their own. Such a 'way of life' is very close to traditional understandings of 'culture' and it can, therefore, be argued that for many – if not the vast majority of – societies throughout history and across the world, 'religion' and 'culture' are one and the same thing.

If this is true then a study of the history of worship within a religious context raises the same questions about boundaries and definitions that I have already raised for 'culture'. Neither of these terms, I would suggest, actually has lasting value as an organising principle for a study such as this.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Robert Swanson's discussion in *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215–c. 1515*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 311–42.

⁴¹ There is a long anthropological tradition behind this kind of definition of religion. See, for example, G. Lewis, *Day of Shining Red, An Essay on Understanding Ritual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980 and more recently C. Humphrey and J. Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual, A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Neither has the analytical robustness to allow us to see what might actually be going on over time and in different parts of the world. We need to look elsewhere for such a tool.

In order to try to make some sense of this history I wish to turn to a concept that I have used before, that of 'discourse'.⁴² Discourse has some advantages over culture and religion in that it is not too familiar, and therefore does not come with quite the same amount of baggage as these other terms. That said, discourse has been used very widely in recent years by a range of authors, each of whom tends to use the concept for their own purposes and with their own definition.⁴³ I therefore need to be more precise about the exact meaning that I am giving to the word in this context. In order to create a usable concept that allows for detailed analysis and explanatory value it makes sense to focus on the use made of the word by one particular author. The most helpful for my purposes is that of Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.⁴⁴ In this text Foucault is trying to understand history and to place particular ideas, and bodies of ideas, into a historical context. It is within this context that he introduces the ideas of 'discourse' and 'discursive fields'. It is through a development of his use of these terms that I wish to try to understand the history of Christian worship.

The Archaeology of Knowledge is a complex text that relies on concepts of discontinuity, difference and rupture in history. There are, however, a number of criteria and principles that come out of Foucault's writings that are worth drawing attention to as these will help us to understand more clearly what I am talking about when I am using discourse in relation to Christian worship. The first point that Foucault makes is the relationship between discourse and 'discursive fields' or 'discursive formations'. Each discursive field has its own set of discourses and this is the primary use of

⁴² M. D. Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship, The Ethnography of Worship in Four Christian Congregations in Manchester*. Birmingham: Birmingham University Press, 1999, 61–79, and 'Discourse and the Ethnographic Study of Sufi Worship: Some Practical Suggestions', in A. Zhelyazkova and J. Nielsen (eds.), *Ethnology of Sufi Orders: Theory and Practice*. Sofia: International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, 2001, 412–32.

⁴³ Those who use discourse as an organising principle tend to make a virtue of its lack of precision. Foucault, for example, says 'As I see it, two series of problems arise at the outset: the first, which I shall leave to one side for the time being and shall return to later, concerns the indiscriminate use that I have made of the terms statement, event and discourse.' M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1972. Lutz and Abu-Lughod go even further. They suggest that 'rather than being alarmed by its spread . . . it might be better to ask . . . what theoretical work . . . [we] want the term to do'. C. Lutz and L. Abu-Lughod (eds.), *Language and the Politics of Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 7.

⁴⁴ London: Routledge, 1972.